Lilith

INDEPENDENT, JEWISH & FRANKLY FEMINIST

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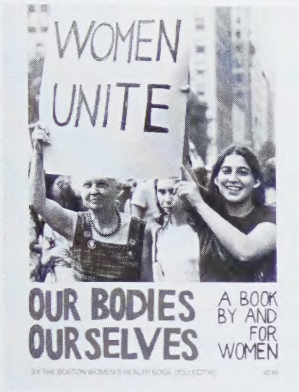
Volume 30, No. 3, Fall 2005

Why is this magazine called Lilith? In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."
—from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, 23a-b



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Cover: Oil painting by Bella Baran. Paintings by Bella can be seen at Gallery Henoch, New York City and Artspace Gallery, Jerusalem or by contacting Bella at bellabaran@012.net.il.

from the editor

Here's a confession: When I find out what women scholars are learning about Jewish women's lives—and how they're analyzing what they discover—I'm entranced. There's hardly any subject that strikes me as too arcane; I'm almost indiscriminately drawn to it all, even when some of the findings have a believe-it-or-not quality, like the fact that in a sect of modern Karaite Jews in California the custom is for women who are menstruating to sit at a separate Shabbat table. (This from a paper delivered at an academic conference.)

At every December meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies, and at the annual meetings of scholars in religion, history and literary studies, more facts about—and clearer interpretations of—the lives of Jewish women emerge than you could have hoped for even a decade ago. And the details are often delicious: We know that the women who ran those famed Catskill Mountain hotels in the 1950s were successful entrepreneurs; Jennie Grossinger of the eponymous resort and cookbook, for one. But did you think of that Catskill leisure world as a path to success that resisted some of the cultural norms for women of that era? Lilith contributing editor Rachel Kranson's new doctoral research shows how these hospitable Hotel Mamas used the domestic role of the 50s to mask the fact that they were tough and successful businesswomen. And of course there's more: for example, the potent experiences of rabbi's wives, once the province of treacly fiction, now come under close and sympathetic scrutiny and analysis in *The Rabbi's Wife*, a new book by Shuly Rubin Schwartz of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Some of the findings of these intrepid women scholars horrify even as we are drawn by the light they cast on the darkest days of Jewish experience. One example appears in this issue in the explicit details Helene Sinnreich gives of the harrowing and often stomach-turning ways women in the Lodz ghetto tried to fight against all-consuming hunger, a result of Nazi torture by starvation.

Regardless of whether some of the details lure or repel you, you've got to agree that our understanding of how Jewish women live—and have lived—is more complex and richer than it has ever been. Don't you want more? I do. I have become a women's research junkie. I want to know more about the material culture and the intellectual energies of Jewish women, not just from 50 years ago, but from the distant past too. I'm moved by the new readings of texts, like the insights Rivy Poupko Kletenik gives us on women's hidden role in the Hanukkah narrative we thought we knew so well already (see page 22). And I crave knowledge of what life was like in the streets of Jerusalem for my father's grandmother, who came to Canada in 1882 from Grodno and then, after settling the family in Winnipeg, convinced her husband (so the story goes) to make aliya to Jerusalem in 1904. What were the streets like there, then? Show me etchings from the period. Let me see what's on the gravestones. (Hers reads: "Rachel, the kosher wife of Dov Ber.")

The rich pleasure of knowing more is one reason you've got to read about the medieval Jewish women who ran financial institutions in Europe a thousand years ago (page 38). It's unlikely that the Hotel Mamas knew of their precursors, but now we do, luckily.

The past can inform the present in useful ways. Without being too obvious….you can read the Judith story (like Yael murdering Sisera with a tent peg) as a gritty tale of a woman doing what one has to do to ensure the survival of her people. You can better understand some of the stereotypes of Jewish women, which emphasize privilege and over-the-top adornment, once you understand how an immigrant people needed proof of success and their entitlement to luxuries. Feminist scholars, by tilting the prism and looking even at known facts in new ways, give us an opportunity to understand our cultural matrices differently, and often more sympathetically.

I'm a women's research junkie.

We're living in an amazing time. When I talk to audiences about the research women have been doing for the past 25 years or so, I sometimes have to stop myself and alter my language. I often start to say that this flowering of women's scholarship on Jewish life is like the Renaissance for its diversity, quality and impact. But then I have to back up and say No. This is *not* a renaissance, because there was no naissance that came before. There's no precursor for this: Academic scholarship in universities coupled with an explosion of interest in learning. Adult education courses attended largely by women springing up in every community. Torah study as part of Jewish yoga retreats; synagogue sisterhood lecture series; Me'ah out of Boston; Melton courses everywhere; New York's advanced Jewish study center for women, Drisha; informal Jewish study and reading groups; JCC classes in Bible women; The Jewish Women's Archive sponsoring research into popular culture (including some of Kranson's); Kolot, The Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, reaching beyond academic circles with its website *ritualwell.org*. The women's culture that characterized much of Jewish women's organized activity in the time of Jennie Grossinger—fashion shows and house tours, theater trips and bowling parties—is changed utterly. The change is happening with wit and rigor, and Lilith is proud to be a part of its influence.

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

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Lilith

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The Mother of All Jewish Film Festivals

Above: Deborah Kaufman. Below: Scene from her new film, "Thirst."

Twenty-five years ago in San Francisco, **Deborah Kaufman** *had a "little" idea to start the first-ever Jewish International Film Festival, an annual event which has since showcased hundreds of artists, encouraged Jewish film around the world, and inspired countless other film series. Her wild ride as both a producer and filmmaker has taken her from Berkeley all the way to the United Nations, and beyond.*

Kaufman sat down with Lilith for a Q&A the week before she was to be honored this summer by the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival for her achievements.

You're a second-generation Jewish San Franciscan. There don't seem to be many of those.

We're rare, but we exist! I was raised in a secular Zionist home. My mother made *aliya* when I went to college, and she still lives in Israel, where she is a poet and translator of Hebrew poetry into English. I grew up in a pretty Jewishly aware home. But don't worry, in the 70s I rebelled like everyone else!

You have a law degree. How did you end up as a filmmaker?

[*laughs*] Out here you are always reinventing yourself—that's the California way. I went to law school in the 70s, and there was this explosion of interest in countercultural Judaism. I had friends who were filmmakers, and were also Jewish, but there was no bridge enabling Jewish independent filmmakers to get their films to audiences. So I had this idea to do a little film festival.

At the beginning it was very small, not ambitious. I never thought I'd have a career as a Jewish arts administrator. It was more like, I can't relate to Holocaust Memorial Day or the High Holidays—what's left for me? The festival grew out of what I guess you could call a secular-cultural-Bundist experiment. It's surprising, but even though Jews dominate Hollywood, there had never been a Jewish film festival before anywhere in the world.

The festival just took off, and before I knew it my whole life was living and breathing film. I didn't even get paid the first year. I was eating air, living in a hovel in Berkeley on a mattress on the floor. But I felt I was creating community.

Has the festival changed a lot over the years?

Well, 25 years later there are hundreds of Jewish film festivals all over the world. It's interesting to see how different they all are—now it's like an institution that has grown up and has a hard time reaching young people. It's the opposite of the pressure that I had. [*laughs*] When I started the festival, we were under pressure to be cutting-edge, experimental, rebellious—now they're under pressure to show romantic comedies and mainstream movies.

After 13 years of directing the festival, you decided to step down and make your own films. Why?

I felt I needed to create the films that I wasn't seeing in the festival.

Your new film, "Thirst," isn't Jewish, but does touch upon the social justice values that you talk about as part of your Jewish upbringing. What made you decide to make a film about water privatization?

Living in California during the so-called "energy crisis," we read that Enron was involved in the water business—and that was scary. We started doing research and we found out that all these corporations were trying to privatize water around the world. We realized that water is going to be like the next oil, the "blue gold" for the 21st century.

We kept hearing stories of resistance to water privatization in developing nations—in Bolivia

the army was brought in to put down a rebellion because the people didn't want to sell off the public water supply—and people were getting shot. They were literally dying in the streets to protect their water. These were stories that needed to be told.

When they think about their water being controlled by a huge foreign multinational corporation, it just doesn't seem right. That's why this film is really about democracy—about who is controlling resources, who has the power to make decisions that affect our daily lives. If a French water company can make more money by taking our water and shipping it to Los Angeles or a different city, they're going to do it. Pretty soon they are going to be able to break apart a polar icecap and ship it in tankers to sell it in China—it sounds crazy, but they are already working on things like that.

"Thirst" was a big hit in Tel Aviv, where it was the opening night feature for the first Israeli Environmental Film Fest. Why did it resonate so strongly there?

Oh, it was so great. The film was screened at the Tel Aviv Cinematheque, and the mayor came. It turns out that he's against privatization. But it's really a global issue, beyond Tel Aviv. The film has played all over the world, even at the United Nations. We have a DVD with subtitles in Spanish, French, and Portuguese.

It sounds like it's been a whirlwind tour. Can you choose a favorite moment?

Let's see. Oh, Atlanta. They had a bad water privatization experience. The water was coming out of the taps brown; there were alerts not to drink the water—even in the most affluent neighborhoods in Atlanta.

We had an incredible screening there organized by multiracial groups, with a lively discussion about water as a human right. Not just an environmental issue, or labor issue, but really about human rights. A week later we heard that they passed a new law that would finance the municipal water utility so that it could remain public.

Where do you get your energy?

I'm really lucky. I'm inspired by a lot of people, by anyone's creativity and risk-taking. You have to get through your own cynicism, and the older you get, the more you feel like things aren't changing fast enough. It can be overwhelming, but the trick is to hang out with people who stay busy and then you don't have the time to get stuck.

Who are some of the new Jewish feminist filmmakers we should be watching out for?

I really admire Michal Aviad, who makes documentaries about Israeli social issues from a woman's point of view, issues like the army and male identity, or relationships between Palestinian and Israeli women. Pearl Gluck is also one to look out for—she has a film called *Divan*. There are more women filmmakers coming up now because the walls have been broken down and the technology is more accessible.

The film festival you started 25 years ago has grown beyond what you ever imagined. Have you thought about where you want to be 25 years from now?

You know, I just want to be living in a healthy planet that's at peace. I just want to continue making films and engaging with people both younger and older who are committed to this work. I'm a *now* person. I'm living right now.

—Orli Cotel

"Brazilian men are expected to be macho. Jewish boys are expected to marry Jewish girls. An Orthodox Jewish male is expected to thank God for not making him a woman. I hate all these religious and social mores but I stick to them because I can't live away from my family."

—from "In Brazil, gay and lesbian Jews struggle for Jewish acceptance," Marcus Moraes, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 1, 2005

Jewish Feminist Blogs—An Unlikely Online Sisterhood

Where can an Orthodox rebbetzin, a radical Jewish Renewal poet and the world's only certified *soferet* (female Torah scribe) meet—across continents and ideological divide—to discuss Torah and politics, family and gender roles? This is my corner of the Jewish women's blogosphere, and it's not your mama's Sisterhood.

Web logs, or "blogs," personal publishing websites, make it possible for people to connect who might never meet in "RL" ("real life," that is, offline).

Blogs offer Jewish feminists the chance to speak publicly—and, if we want, anonymously, like *Voices from the Other Side of the Curtain*, where the talk is about God, self-esteem and ghosts (the shadows of children who've left *frumkeit* behind). *Renegade Rebbetzin* defies stereotypes of a rabbi's wife, blogging about her crushes on celebrities and taking jabs at congregants. Such blogs, setting forth things their writers can't utter aloud, reach people both within and beyond the world they describe. The confessional nature of blogs make subjects that might be verboten in other media (like dating and single life) fair game.

Many writers proudly publish under their own names. **Aviel Barclay**, the *soferet*, blogs joyously on *Netivat Sofrut* about her love affair with Hebrew letters and words. "Fixing another Torah today…" a recent post began. "I feel so exhilarated when I correct G-d's 4-letter name!…I sense a deep *tiqun* [healing] not 'just' of The Name, but of everything…"

Blogs can take on a life of their own. **Danya Ruttenberg**, editor of the book *Yentl's Revenge*, began the blog *Jerusalem Syndrome* to chronicle her year abroad. The site has outlived her time in Jerusalem, becoming a forum for Ruttenberg's fans to meet the feminista behind the printed page. (My favorite of her posts: instructions for how women can make our own *tallitot k'tanot*, fringed undergarments once restricted to religious males.) She also contributes to the popular progressive collective blog *JewSchool*.

Some blogs wear the badge of feminism more prominently than others. Author **Naomi Chana** of *Baraita*, whose posts leap gracefully from analysis of liturgy to gender roles to Shabbat recipes wrote recently:

"Some of you … might be under the impression that I am a liberal feminist because I have, y'know, said so [or] from…my commitment to egalitarian traditions of prayer and education.… But the latest argument to hit certain sections of the Jewish blogosphere informs me that, no, actually I am a liberal feminist…because—hold on to your seats, folk—this one time I co-sponsored the kiddush."

Baraita attracts a diverse crowd of articulate readers who contribute their own ideas about religion and feminism, and continue the threads of conversation.

The Jewish blogosphere in general skews conservative. Are religious liberals less likely to pontificate? Or maybe they don't identify themselves denominationally. One way or another, I've befriended more religious conservatives in the blogosphere than I ever would have met at shul. Our writing connects us in ways that might never be manifest otherwise. In a time when Jewish communal divisions are all over the news (think "disengagement"), it's a blessing to be able to find common ground: we have things to say, and blogging allows us to be heard.

Netivat Sofrut once reminded readers "there is Torah in these pages," and asked us to say the blessing for studying Torah before delving in. In this Jewish feminist blogosphere, we're writing the Torah of our lives, filling in what was hidden in that holy white fire, and we're doing it side by side. It's a hell of a Sisterhood.

—Rachel Barenblat

You can join this sisterhood at:

Baraita
http://baraita.net/blog/

Chayyei Sarah
http://chayyeisarah.blogspot.com/

Jerusalem Syndrome
http://jerusalemsyndrome.blogspot.com

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http://www.jewschool.com

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http://soferet.blogspot.com/

New Reform Jew
http://www.newreformjew.org/

Renegade Rebbetzin
http://renegaderebbetzin.blogspot.com/

Velveteen Rabbi
http://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com
(full disclosure: this is my blog)

Voices from Our Side of the Curtain
http://voicesfromourside.blogspot.com

"The Conservative movement must withdraw permission to be anything other than fair to women. Talmudists like me know that feminist changes, and others on the agenda like the ordination of gays as rabbis, are all doable within the framework of halakha."

—Rabbi Judith Hauptman on "The Challenge Facing the Conservative Movement," in New York's Jewish Week, July 8, 2005

"It's About Difficult Conversations"

Sachi Feris wants you to know that for millions of kids heading back to school this fall, segregation did not end in 1954. More than 50 years after the landmark ruling in *Brown V. the Board of Education*, an overwhelming majority of students still attend schools that are de facto segregated.

That's why, at the age of 24, Sachi started Border Crossers, a program bringing together elementary school students from all over New York City so that they can have some contact with each other's cultures.

"I grew up in New York City where 90 percent of my friends were white and Jewish," says Sachi. "When I went to college, that was the first time in my life that Jewish wasn't the majority. I had always known that was the case, but on a day-to-day level, growing up in NYC, that wasn't my reality. I realized there's this thing called white privilege that I had never heard of before, and I had to do something about it."

Border Crossers brings together kids who wouldn't ordinarily meet. The students, from five different schools, take turns visiting each other, experiencing the other groups' space and seeing each neighborhood. Using poetry, drama, art, and journal-writing, they have a chance to express both commonalities and differences.

"If you go on Google and do a search for lesson plans on discrimination, you'll find lots of materials for high school—but almost nothing for younger kids," Sachi notes. "People say, 'fourth graders aren't ready for this, they don't know what discrimination is,' but that's simply not true. You can ask them 'what does it feel like to be treated differently because of your age'—every kid understands that."

Sachi runs the program on a shoestring budget. Border Crossers' teachers are paid only a modest stipend, dedicating themselves because they care about uniting young people from different backgrounds. The program culminates in a collaborative social justice project; this year, students from all the schools joined together to paint a mural that told their story.

Although the program grew out of her desire to reach out to groups beyond her Jewish friends and family, Sachi says that the idea is, for her, a way to come closer to the social justice values that are an intrinsic part of her Judaism. She feels that exploring cultural bridges and boundaries is a form of *tzedakah*. Eventually, she hopes to make the curriculum widely accessible to teachers in other cities. —*O.C.*

To Russia, with Love and Books

The policy of a Hebrew day school in Westchester County, New York, **prohibiting non-Jewish prom dates** elicited a spirited response from student **Karla Bertrand** in the school paper.

"It is insulting that after one, two, three or even 12 years of religious education, the school doesn't feel that it has instilled in us the values to be discerning in our choice of company."

—from "Is My Prom Date Kosher?" by Gabrielle Birkner, in New York's Jewish Week, June 17, 2005.

In July of last year I boarded a plane headed for Moscow with two hagadot in my suitcase: my grandmother's, dog-eared and stained, which she'd carried to America along with her brass candlesticks, and an interactive hagada designed for preschoolers. I was also bringing more than 600 Jewish children's books (with translations into Russian hand-pasted between the pages) and plans for a three-day education workshop.

My 50th birthday was the catalyst for this trip that reversed the steps of my grandparents' journey of 100 years before. I'd organized a conference with the Egalitarian Minyan of Rogers Park, Chicago Action for Soviet Jewry and the Joint Distribution Committee for Jewish teachers in Moscow. The 44 attendees (all but two of them women), from 40 communities, traveled by train to the Pushkine Conference Center from as far away as the Ural Mountains.

One teacher, **Olga**, recounted her memory of being torn out of her religious grandmother's arms because her parents were afraid of repercussions if they showed their Jewishness. But Olga never forgot her heritage. She enrolled her son in a Jewish nursery school, and quit her job as a metallurgist to work at the school so she could learn along with him. "I have no Jewish memories," she told us. Her story felt oddly familiar. My mother gave up some of her religious practices to become more American, and I, like Olga, was returning to the Judaism of my roots.

We studied *Exodus 3:2* together and discussed why God chose the burning bush as a sign for Moses. **Svetlana** suggested that the Egyptians, and Moses in particular, were so far from God that they needed magic to get their attention. **Katya** disagreed, suggesting that the burning bush was protecting Moses from the heat of God's face. Russian Jews today live a similar dichotomy. On the one hand, they need magic to attract Jews who have no sense of communal history, and on the other they want to examine the texts from a purely intellectual approach.

In my bibliodrama workshop, **Elina** created a midrash about a bracelet in Egypt which was later melted down to build the golden calf. She interpreted her midrash as an allegory for the Russian Jewish experience; the bracelet was Jewish culture destroyed during the Communist era. Inspired by a workshop on creating Jewish ritual, we honored **Larissa**, a bride of two months, with an interpretive version of the Sheva Brachot, the seven wedding blessings: *"May you have many children and may you be privileged to travel with them to Jerusalem to see the land of your inheritance."*

Food presented an opportunity to put our theory into practice. On the last day of the conference we baked challah together from a recipe handed down from my grandmother. The challot baked while we shared our final meal, and then the participants took them home to enjoy in their own communities that Friday night.

This journey had brought me full circle. Once upon a time my mother's *zayde* was the patriarch leading the family seder with the dog-eared hagada he had brought with him all the way from Kishinev. Now I was the educating matriarch teaching Russian Jews new ways to celebrate the holiday.

—Beverly Fried Fox

You can read more about this project, and how you too can send books to Russia, at egalitarianminyan.org

A Teen Photographer's Gaza Scoop

At 17, **Kitra Cahana** has suddenly become one of Israel's leading photojournalists. Her poignant photo of a Jewish boy in Gaza pushing at the sorrowful Israeli soldiers moving him out of Neve Dekalim appeared in the New York Times on the opening day of the disengagement in August. A visiting Canadian student this year at the Hebrew University, Cahana divided her time between her studies and an internship as a photographer for a photo agency. Entering the field last September with zero prior experience, her work has already appeared in the pages of Israeli, Italian, French, and American periodicals; her photograph of First Lady **Laura Bush** visiting the Western Wall last spring made page one of USA Today.

"I've always wanted to be an artist," Cahana said by cellphone this summer from the Gaza Strip "When I started seeing the photos coming out of the Iraqi conflict in 2002, I realized I can make art out of reality."

In the course of her work, Cahana has visited with the clandestine ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionist group Neturei Karta and attended Palestinian demonstrations against the separation barrier. She has thrown herself into riots, stampedes, and clouds of tear gas, her camera in tow. "I really use photography to learn about and to get connected to Israel. I use it to be a part of this beauty."

Since July, she has been living and photographing in Neve Dekalim, the largest settlement in the Jewish area of the Gaza Strip. An independent "guerilla journalist" with no immediate ties to the community, though she is a cousin of the late controversial **Rabbi Meir Kahane**, she told the blog Jewschool that "[being young and] having the settler background in my family…people will come up to me and invite me into their homes, but they won't come up to other photographers. The insurgents from Gush Etzion won't talk to any other press, but they invited me for Shabbat. I went to one family for Shabbat and they brought out a Qassam that came through their roof and put it on the table. We were sitting around a Qassam singing *zemirot* (Shabbat songs). It was surreal."

Through her haunting images, Cahana closes in intimately on Israeli life. And she isn't even old enough for a press pass.

—Adapted from an article by Dan 'Mobius' Sieradski on the blog Jewschool, August 2, 2005

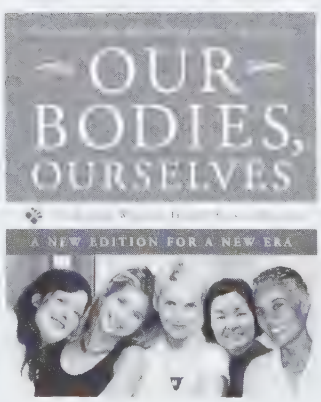
"Girls Prep is a thrilling addition to our city and the lives of girls living on the Lower East Side. Finally these girls will be able to choose a single-sex education—**a privilege that girls on the Upper East Side have had for well over a hundred years.**"

—Miriam Lewis Raccah and Sheri Sandler, announcing a new public charter school in New York City.

OUR BODIES OURSELVES

A BOOK BY ~~AND~~ ~~FOR~~ WOMEN

by Shala Erlich



The classic women's health book, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, now in its 35th anniversary edition, has gotten into the hands—and minds—of millions of women. The book, which has sold four million copies and been translated into 18 languages and Braille, is a very old friend of mine. *OBOS* has been a lively, wise mentor through the curiosity of my adolescence, a confidante during my first anticipations and experiences of sex, and a spur for my earliest twinges of feminist consciousness. *OBOS* was the source of ideas I found myself latching onto in medical school, and the litmus test for good docs in my own experiences as a patient. This book, originally emblazoned with the subtitle "by and for women," has felt like a whole community at my side, connecting my personal pleasures, angers, and questions with the lives of other women, and giving them a larger social and political context.

With its clear medical information, anatomical illustrations, bold photos of real-life people (not generic line drawings), and frank first-person accounts, this landmark book takes as its terrain body image, our intimate relationships and sexuality, birth control, abortion, the decision to have children, infertility, rape, aging, "some common and uncommon" health problems, and the politics of women and medical care. *OBOS* was one of the first modern health references written for the lay person, and for quite a while was the only one focusing reliably on women. In the pre-Internet age, it was the first, and by far the best, place to learn the facts (accompanied by a lucid feminist critique of modern American medicine) and to hear the voices of other women—kind of a combination of Google and blogs, but with the heft and comfort that I still draw from an actual book I can clutch in my hands.

I'd searched for years for non-parental confirmation that adults not only had sex but also enjoyed it.

The book's strengths include its earnest, impassioned, tell-it-like-it-is approach and its bedrock reliability. But what has most powerfully sustained my love for the book is its use of first-person stories that have stuck with me for years and its photos of charmingly, certifiably real people exploring and enjoying their bodies. Many of these strengths have been preserved in the most recent edition; some, sadly, have not. Raw health information is now widely available, in print and online, but informed alchemy is still needed to turn this lead into gold. I worry that this new edition, entitled *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A New Edition for a New Era* (Simon & Schuster, 2005, $24.95), will fail the next generation of young women looking for an approach that honors their everyday strengths and beauty, together with the particular quirks, hair, blood, fat, and other realities of living in our individual female bodies.

Our Bodies, Ourselves and I are the same age—both arriving in 1970—but we didn't meet until I was 14 and read the 1984 *New Our Bodies, Ourselves* up in my family's third-floor attic, stretched out on my belly, hip bones pressed into the fuzzy beige carpet. I'd found the book while grazing my family's haphazardly organized bookshelves looking for something juicy to read.

I stuck ardently to the chapters on relationships and sexuality, taking in all the pictures and falling in love with the italicized first-person stories that illuminated each section. My parents talked to me and my siblings about sex and reproduction early and often. But it was one thing to hear at the dinner table, through our eye-rolling, that "making love is a beautiful thing," and another to hear women's voices reporting the ups and downs of masturbation and orgasms (or lack thereof). I listened in on all the power struggles, inner demons, flames of emotion and sensation, joy, satisfactions, and the spoken and unspoken, explicit and dreamy connections involved in sex with another person. I'd searched for years for non-parental confirmation that adults not only had sex (of which they gave very little indication) but possibly also enjoyed it (even less information here). I hadn't come up with very many clues other than continued population growth and my parents' copies of *The Joy of Sex* and *Peyton Place*. Except for exploring my own body pleasurably since childhood, and a little teenage kissing, I didn't get to "actual sex" until after high school. Would I like sex when the time came, I remember wondering.

Reading *OBOS* was like gaining entry to an all-ages slumber party. The women's voices reassured me that sex is real, complex, commonplace, and extraordinary. One of the best things about sex, aside from the sheer physical pleasure, is how it is an oasis among other experiences: the tender, green discovery that it is possible, permissible, to be so intimate with another person. The open, friendly discussions in *OBOS*, a secret garden in print, shared something in common with the intimacy of sex itself, and gave me a similar feeling of exhilaration and acceptance.

My favorite bio-snippet from that period was from the section on sex and physical disabilities:

> *I persist in feeling that my body is ugly when I'm naked. Yet my husband clearly loves making love with me. I asked him one day if I made love with a limp. "Yes," he said, "you make love with a rhythm like your walking rhythm. It's nice."*

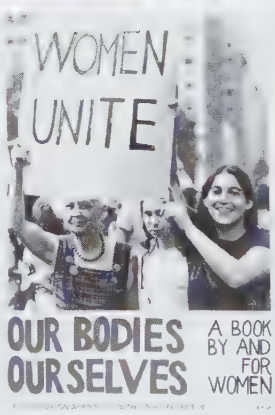
This woman, and the book as a whole, did not gloss over how challenging it could be to feel good about your body. Her story said that your sexual expression was of a piece with the rest of you, not something isolated and exotic. I learned from her that I might hold big or small grudges against my body based on big or small reasons, but my body and my personality, with all their idiosyncrasies and flaws, could form a lovely whole. And it was quite possible I would find someone who would love making love with me, drawn by the way all my personal elements fit together. One of the larger messages of the book came through clearly here: self-knowledge that included your physical self was a form of realism, confidence, and power. I credit *OBOS* as one of the influences that helped me, from my teen years on, cultivate interest, ease and pleasure in my body, in and out of sex.

In college, I found a way, in that strange bouquet of classes—classical Greek, Virginia Woolf, developmental biology—to make contact with my old friend by writing a paper on *OBOS* for a class on the history of American medicine. I read the book's original preface, entitled "A Good Story," about how a group of women in 1969, galvanized by frustration at their own lack of health information and bad experiences with doctors, embarked on a project to educate themselves about their bodies, and then share their knowledge, forming the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, and producing the earliest, mimeographed versions of *OBOS*. Now I could see the book's historical context: its roots in the feminist movement, the consumer rights movement, and an anti-authoritarian zeitgeist triggered by the Vietnam War. It was fun to revisit the sex chapters, now that I could connect them with my own experiences (and there was the additional thrill of reading and writing about sex and bodies for an academic paper in that atmosphere where, as a rule, one snootily divorced the pursuits of the mind from those of the body), but now I could also relate to the anger and activism driving the book. Twenty years after it first appeared, I found I could barely turn around without encountering attitudes the book's founding mothers noted in the original preface, doctors "who were condescending, paternalistic, judgmental, and non-informative."

My first year of college, I'd gone to the student health center for information on birth control, especially non-hormonal methods (I am a D.E.S. daughter—another complicated, sordid

tale of medical ignorance and malfeasance), but the portly old doctor behind his desk would talk to me only about the Pill, "because we don't want to get pregnant, do we?"

Then, the spring after I wrote my *OBOS* paper, I found a lump in my breast. My mother had been treated for breast cancer four years before. I knew the lump was unlikely to be anything serious, but knew it needed medical evaluation. I couldn't get an appointment with my



nurse practitioner, so I went to see an unfamiliar doctor, a young guy who examined my breasts and referred me straight to the surgery center on the floor below. "It's probably nothing," he said, "but they can always just scoop it out."

In the stairwell, I kept picturing my mother's melon-baller, and contemplated continuing down and out of the building. But my sense of duty to myself won out. I approached the surgery floor and got the earliest possible appointment—for one month later.

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The portly old doctor wanted me on the Pill, "because we don't want to get pregnant, do we?"

I called my nurse practitioner, who said, "What nonsense! I'll get you an ultrasound and we'll figure out if this is a cyst, which is very common and benign." At my ultrasound appointment at the hospital, the technician ran her probe over my jellied breast and kept furrowing her brow at the monitor, positioned so I couldn't see it. She was having some problem visualizing the deepest part of my lump and called in a team of doctors to consult. Finally, after a good 10 minutes without addressing a word to me, the senior doctor turned and said to me, in a crisp British accent, "It's a cyst. Completely benign, dear, but you can have it out, if you want to be neurotic about it."

From the depths of a turbulent silence, I felt glad to have read so recently in *OBOS* that this kind of treatment was not due to a defect in my own actions, body, or sanity.

A short time later I could credit *OBOS* as a major influence in my decision to pursue a medical career. I went to medical school with a mix of motivations: I was interested in weaving together the biological and human narratives about our bodies. I wanted to gain access to medical knowledge and language, a bit the way I chose to study French because my parents used it to talk about things they didn't want us kids to understand. And I had a burning certainty that there had to be a better way to treat and talk to patients than what I had experienced.

Immersed in medical texts and medical ways, I didn't read *OBOS* again for several years, though its lessons stayed in my thoughts. Although I met many lovely human beings in medicine, people who work with grace and dedication, I also learned that the system as a whole exerts dehumanizing pressures. Among them: a tradition of gamesmanship and competition, showing off knowledge while bluffing about one's lack of it; pressure to hide emotion, doubt, or ignorance; constant bribery by the drug companies and a lack of skepticism or restraint about using medication; self-important, belittling jargon ("incompetent cervix," "the patient failed chemotherapy"); the low value (literally and figuratively) placed on talking to patients compared to everything else you might do for or *to* them. And always my amazement and outrage at how little most people have been taught about our bodies (women's alienation from our own reproductive anatomy is only one of the most striking examples of the larger problem) and how that ignorance adds to the fear and discomfort of medical experiences.

Now I am teaching and writing about medicine, not practicing it. I teach undergraduate nursing students and graduate nurse-practitioner students, almost all women. And in the spirit of teaching people outside of the health care professions about our bodies, I've been developing workshops on anatomy and physiology at my yoga studio. During my training, I loved creating rapport with patients, figuring out the puzzle of their problems, and explaining what I thought was happening and what it meant in plain language. I am glad to have escaped the Scylla and Charybdis of emotional distancing and all-consuming empathy, and the strange combination of hypervigilance and tedium I felt when treating patients. The same *OBOS*-inspired idealism, passion for emotional honesty and plainspokenness, and fascination with the known-facts and subjective mysteries of bodies that helped draw me to medicine is also what took me out of it.

Revisiting *OBOS* in my mid-thirties, I'm struck by how much more of the life cycle resonates with me. I'm married, I've had a baby, my mother is in her sixties, I've grieved the deaths of my grandmothers, and gone through medical training. Now, looking at this fancy new 35th anniversary edition of the book, it's not just the sex chapters that interest me.

This edition was made possible by support from Harvard's Brigham and Women's Hospital and the Boston University School of Public Health, and the list of contributors is a sparkling array of women working in medicine, public health, education and journalism. But it's hard to relate to my friend's twenty-first century, professionalized, highly groomed appearance. She's certainly doing a lot more shaving and plucking these days (so, okay, I'm not in one of my hairier phases either), but I suspect her of resorting to cosmetic surgery. The updated medical information is just as clear and sound as ever, supplemented by a companion website (www.ourbodiesourselves.org). And I'm pleased to see the first-person passages still there, including ones of early vintage. But the photographs are very disappointing. Some examples?

Disabilities and sex. While the original negative-image photo of a softly rounded woman in a wheel chair passionately kissing a person of indeterminate (I always thought female) gender is, admittedly, dated, did it have to be replaced by the model-skinny woman in movie-poster embrace in the surf with her soft-focus wheelchair in the background?

Masturbation: The exuberant, fuzzy-legged, post-orgasmic, lovely nude woman on a friendly living room couch has been replaced by a stick-like woman in a tank top with her hand in her underwear, her face turned away, her legs, couch, and impersonal setting cropped so that she looks, all in all, very much like the model in the blandly "provocative and quasi-pornographic" Calvin Klein ad that the book critiques in its chapter on body image.

Self-examination: The latest edition includes a photo of one woman helping another woman look at her cervix in a mirror, but while it obviously comes from the original roll of 1970s film (was this the last time a woman looked at her own cervix?), the editors have chosen a photo—unlike the one in

www.Lilith.org

The cover image of a white-haired woman and a Nice Jewish Girl has shrunk with each edition, but the current book gets rid of it entirely.

earlier editions—that leaves out the face of the woman-with-the-cervix and the smile and eye-contact of her assistant.

Bearing the most symbolic weight are the changes in the cover photography. The image of a white-haired woman and a beaming Nice Jewish Girl marching with a huge "WOMEN UNITE" placard has shrunk with each edition (from 7 inches across in 1971 to an inch and a half in 1998), but the current edition is the first one to get rid of it entirely. Instead, we have a tableau of five airbrushed women. In the center, two blue-eyed, bleached and highlighted blondes who (despite the lesbian-identifying necklace on one) look like they were extruded from the same plastic tube that produces everyone on TV. At the periphery, the token chubby woman on one side and, on the other, the elegant African-American and Asian women, neither of whom looks more than 60.

In general, the older editions' photos looked endearingly like they came straight out of the family albums of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective. They were charming snapshots of people who could be your cousins (among other losses, the photo of the Jewish wedding couple up on chairs is gone). This edition's photos tend toward the posed, the bland, and the slick, to the point of being inexplicable; the chapter on gender identity displays an unironic photo of a college-aged woman focused on the task of painting her nails, and the chapter on infertility shows a creepily angelic, side-lit blond nurse comforting an African-American woman who looks like she's in her late 40s. I do not think it is only my nostalgia for the *au naturel* innocence of the seventies that makes me find these photos so artificial and colorless. I'm additionally disappointed because I always loved the book—beyond its value as a practical reference—for its literary power (like my love for *Jane Eyre* or *Little Women*), which it largely retains, and also for the veracity of its images, the loss of which feels like a betrayal. ●

Shala Erlich lives in Seattle with her husband and her two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, who asks a lot of questions about her body.

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myrna@culturaljudaism.org

THE CENTER FOR CULTURAL JUDAISM

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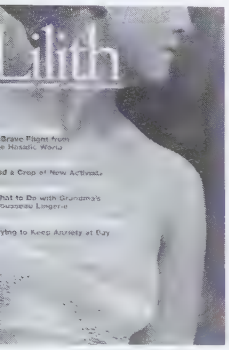
Escaping Hasidism

Your article ["Malkie: An Immigrant to a New World Adjusts Her Compass," Winter 2004-05] about young women who left the Orthodox community spoke to me , but I noticed that all of the interview subjects left before they married and started a family. Small wonder.



I became a Lubavitcher in a fit of adolescent fervor at the age of 15. I was engaged at 18, married a month after my nineteenth birthday, and birthed seven children in a 10-year span. It took almost 30 years for me to wake up and get out. Most never do, since a life of *bitul hayesh*, or self nullification, is the ultimate ideal. That static, ordered world is hypnotic.

Fundamentalism is like a drug; it soothes all anxieties, puts all questions to rest, overlays all other needs and desires. I was unprepared after I left to have to grow up and confront a life of ambivalence and an unclear path, an uncertain God.

Today I assert that no book, no matter how ancient or holy—and no rabbi—can grant me or deny me holiness. How I do that is between me and God. Our beautiful teachings and traditions are guides, not taskmasters. It is my responsibility to create a holiness that I define for myself in my life and in my relationships.

Leah Lax
Houston TX

[Leah Lax is writing a memoir on fundamentalism and sexuality in the Hasidic world.]

Making women rabbis

Amy Stone's article "20 Years of Conservative Women Rabbis" [Summer 2005] offered a vivid critique of the new video produced by the Jewish Theological Seminary. But one crucial point wasn't clear enough.

Amy is too modest to note that her own groundbreaking 1977 article in Lilith, "Gentlemen's Agreement in the Seminary," was quite significant in pushing JTS to finally do the right thing.

In a just world, the Jewish Theological Seminary would honor all those who fought for the ordination of women as Conservative rabbis—including Amy Stone, Susan Weidman Schneider, Aviva Cantor and other early editors of Lilith, as well as Francine Klagsbrun, Judith Hauptman, and many other activists whose names aren't widely known. In a just world, the Seminary's new video would do the same.

Bob Lamm
via email

That JAP...

I was appalled at Alana Newhouse's article, "The JAP: Reclaim Her or Reject Her?" and disappointed with Miriam Stone's "The Shame of the JAP" [Summer 2005].

There is reason why feminists "waged battles again the JAP stereotype for years." What is a JAP, anyway? A frigid "girl" who demands and expects her father to give her anything she wants materialistically—from clothes to a nose job—and expects her mother to do anything laborious that she needs—from cooking and cleaning to babysitting at the drop of a hat. She was a materialistic, shallow person who only thought of herself. Is this admirable? Is this what Ms. Newhouse found to "feel so right?"

Let us not forget the "JAP baiting" on college campuses, when Jewish girls were not only made fun of, but had items pelted at them during football games and [heard] jokes about "the only good JAP is a dead JAP," and "what do you call 49 JAPs floating face down in the river? A start."

The stereotype was so prevalent that Jewish men wouldn't even attempt to date Jewish women. Not only is this an insult to Jewish women, but it is isolating—and it left fewer Jewish men for Jewish women to marry.

Think about it: No other ethnic group would allow their women to be stereotyped in such a derogatory manner. Why should Jews?

I am left scratching my head as to why Lilith would even consider publishing such an article. I think Lilith owes Jewish women and the Jewish people in general a huge apology.

Nita Polay Levin
Edison NJ

[The examples the writer gives come largely from Lilith coverage of JAP-baiting in 1987 and later. The articles in the summer 2005 issue reveal how women in their twenties react to the stereotype today. You can order this issue at Lilith.org]

"The damage done has never left me."

While visiting my 97-year-old mother at the Jewish nursing home, I picked up a copy of your magazine. On seeing the article about relationship abuse ["Misery Beyond the Mezzuzah" by Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Summer 2005], all the memories of my childhood came flooding back. **My father was considered a pillar of our community despite being a public alcoholic.** He was at times a good father but most times horrible to live with. He tormented my mother and me, saying he would put us in a mental hospital for disagreeing with him.

Although I am now 60, the damage done has never left me, even after years of help. I remember well as a teenager when the head Orthodox rabbi of the town I grew up in came to the house and told my mother that she must obey my father, that he was a good man. After my father died I asked my mother why did she stay and put us through such hell. She said for security, for the money. Yes, we had the money but we also had the horror, the missed normal childhood and lack of trust of others forever.

Lois Martin
Brookline MA

LILITH welcomes comments from readers. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and clarity.

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That Night in the Museum

by Dara Horn

It was Sara's fault, really. She was the one who persuaded him to go to the singles' cocktail hour at the museum.

In the weeks since his divorce, Sara had begged him to try to meet someone new, to make at least some vague effort toward being happy—perfect, productive Sara, hopeful enough to have just gotten married in their mother's hospital room two weeks before their mother died, and tough enough to already begin picking up the shards. It had been easier to say yes to Sara than to explain to her why he had no hope or interest in going.

But when he passed through the museum's metal detectors and entered the crowded gallery, he saw that the other people at the exhibit of "Marc Chagall's Russian Years" were little more than walking ghosts: his mother, his father, preserved in other people's skin. Glimpsing the side of a woman's head—a younger woman, of course, but another remarkable thing about the dead is that they are all ages, preserved at every age you ever knew them, and at no age at all—he had to fight the impulse to glance at the profile again, unwilling to feel the sick relief that came with confirming an unfamiliar face. It was easier to look at the art.

Ben edged away from the crowds at the center of the gallery, toward the paintings on the walls. He stopped alongside a giant canvas titled—he stooped to read the caption—The Promenade. A man stood in the middle of the painting, legs apart as if striding with confidence, one hand at his side holding a small bird, the other in the air, holding the hand of a woman—a woman who flew in the air like a flag on the flagpole of his wrist, her magenta dress fluttering in the wind. Another large canvas, called Over the Town, cast both man and woman into the sky, wearing different clothes this time, a green shirt for the man, a blue dress for the woman, with petticoats flying at her ankles. The two of them soared over the town below, in a sky pure white, as if the flying people, ruling the air, hadn't yet decided what to fill it with. For a moment Ben wished he could fly. And then, as he turned around to cross the gallery, someone called his name.

"And what about you, Benjamin Ziskind?"

Ben looked up, startled. Had someone from the show tracked him down? But as he scanned the unfamiliar faces of the three women who had closed in around him beneath the flying woman, he realized that everyone was wearing a name tag, and someone had just read his aloud. He was trapped.

The three women laughed, and Ben forced a smile, wincing as he remembered why he was ostensibly here. He glanced at the name tag of the woman who had spoken: "Erica Frank, Museum Staff." A shill, he thought. Too bad; she was the most attractive of the three. She was slightly shorter than him, with curved hips, long hair the color of damp rope, and (Ben was captivated and then ashamed to notice) a glimpse of shadowed skin that shimmered between the buttons of her bright blue blouse. Her green eyes were watching him. In the glass covering the painting behind her head, he turned away from his own reflection: short, dark, unworthy. He remembered how he had first met Nina two years ago—at a party like this one, but in Sara's apartment. He was happier then, less fearful. He had told a joke, a bad one, some horrible pun, and she had laughed. Ben wasn't used to people laughing with him instead of at him. He would have married her on the spot. On the night two weeks after his mother died, when his wife failed to come home from work, he had assumed she had been kidnapped.

"We were just talking about languages in museum work, translations, that kind of thing," Erica Frank was saying. "Do you speak any foreign languages?"

Ben resented being forced into this inane conversation, but he remembered Sara pleading with him and knew he owed it to her to try. He in fact spoke several languages, but he tried to pick the one that would end the conversation the fastest. "Yiddish," he said. He immediately wished he had lied.

He regretted it more when Erica Frank, Museum Staff, appeared suddenly intrigued. "Wow, I didn't know anybody knew Yiddish anymore," she said, staring. Yes, Ben wished he could announce, I am a freak, a relic, a generational error, a leftover shard from a broken world. Now please let me go home. But he was caught. "Why did you—I mean, where did

you learn it? From your grandparents?" she asked.

Ben looked at the three women and felt as if he were facing a panel of judges. "From my father," he said. Erica was looking at him, absently brushing a strand of golden hair away from her cheek. For a moment he felt hopeful, but then he remembered where the conversation had lurched. He was beginning to wish he could leap over their heads and vanish into the sky.

"Do you still speak it with him?" Erica asked, a wide smile on her face.

"He's been dead for almost twenty years, so no."

Ben hadn't meant to snap at her, but he was strangely happy that he had. The smiling faces on the panel seemed to fall to the ground, like dropped masks. The air yawned between him and the three others, stretching into a wide, blank space of empty canvas.

"I'm so sorry," Erica stuttered.

Everyone looked at the floor for the obligatory seven seconds before someone changed the subject, a ritual deeply familiar to people whose parents die young. Ben waited for the obligatory seven seconds to pass. It had been years since he had felt embarrassed during those seconds. By now they felt to him like time spent waiting for an elevator: boring, wasteful, a chance to run errands in one's head. Sara had mentioned that she was going to stop by his place after he got home, he remembered. She claimed to have news, and she promised him that it wasn't about selling their parents' house. But it was impossible that it wasn't about selling the house, Ben thought. What else was there to talk about?

him. In the glass covering the painting behind her head, he turned away from his own reflection: short, dark, unworthy

"What's really interesting about Yiddish," Erica was saying, the first courageous soul to break the silence, "is how much humor there is in it."

Her smile, which had seemed so promising just moments before, was beginning to sicken him. "No more than any other language," he muttered. But what it really does have, he thought—what you don't know it has, because it isn't in any Woody Allen movies—is a world of the dead built into it, a true fear of heaven, an automatic need to invoke the presence of God whenever saying anything good or bad about anyone or anything, an absolute trust that the other world, if one could call it that, is not separate from this one, that eternity is always breathing over your shoulder, waiting to see if you will notice. But Ben didn't say anything more. Instead he glanced at Erica and then looked at his feet, noticing for the first time that in the haze of changing his clothes after work and going to the Chagall exhibit, he had somehow ended up wearing two slightly different shoes.

"You'll have to excuse me," he announced, and pushed his way out of the circle into the very crowded room. he moved toward the sides of the gallery, staring up at the paintings that interrupted the walls like gigantic plate-glass windows, offering views beyond the room. Some of them, he saw, hung limp on the gallery walls, tired and derivative, a parade of boxy men like early Cubist works, or distorted interiors with absurdly bright wallpaper borrowed from Matisse. Ben became more interested when things started to fly: first clouds, then words, then angels, then goats, and finally men and women, soaring through the air. The more things flew, the better the paintings became. Occasionally, as he moved along the gallery walls, he thought of Erica Frank. He stared at the flying goats and resisted the impulse to search for her again over his shoulder. A few times, he allowed himself to turn around and scan the crowd for her face. When he didn't see her, he was surprised to find himself disappointed. He stared at the paintings until they seemed to dissolve into blank white space.

A man near the door at the end of the gallery cupped his hands to his mouth, trying his best to roar above the crowd. "The band will be starting up downstairs in five minutes," he bellowed.

A band? Sara must not have known about the band, Ben thought. He wasn't about to listen to music; the year of mourning wasn't over yet. For a moment he panicked. Then, as the hordes of jabbering singles began to flow down toward the door on the opposite end of the gallery, he realized, grateful, that he now had an excuse to go home. The room emptied quickly, and soon he was the only person in it, standing at the far end of the gallery next to a series of tiny paintings. He was about to turn around when a woman's head leaned back into the room from a nearby doorway, a blur of light brown hair. Erica Frank.

"Going downstairs?" she asked.

He was surprised to see that she was smiling. Had she forgotten their awkward conversation before? No, it didn't look that way. Her smile was different from before: dark, canny, her upper lip slightly curled as if they had shared a private joke. Suddenly he felt as though he were seeing an actress backstage, shifting from playing a part to being herself. She was forgiving him, it seemed. Or was she just laughing at him? He searched for something to say to make her stay a moment longer, to test her, to see. "I'll be down in a minute," he answered, and for a split second he wished it were true.

But it wouldn't have mattered. "I can't stay for the music," she said, and Ben briefly wondered why. But

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only briefly, because she was already moving away. "Have fun," she said with a wave.

Ben watched as she vanished from the room, cutting back into the gallery and through a white door marked "Staff Only." The door hovered open for a moment, framing the back of her hair, which glimmered gold in the shadow within the outlines of the doorway. Then the door closed behind her, a blank white wall. Ben felt the entire wasted evening draining through his gut. Well, Sara, he thought, surveying the empty gallery, I tried. He turned to leave. And then he stopped.

It was a painting of a street. The street was covered with snow, and lined by a short iron fence and little crooked buildings whose rooftops bent and reflected in all directions. Above the street, a man with a beard, pack, hat, and cane hovered in the sky, moving over the houses as if walking—unaware, in murky horizontal profile, that he was actually in flight. The painting was tiny, smaller than a piece of notebook paper. The label next to the painting offered its date as 1914 and its owner as a museum in Russia, titling it Study for "Over Vitebsk." This intrigued Ben, who despite his mastery of trivia on all topics, including modern art, had never before known this particular painting's name. All he knew was that it used to hang over the piano in the living room of his parents' house.

Now in the silent white gallery, in front of Study for "Over Vitebsk," Ben stood still. He looked at the floating man with the cane, the dark late autumn or early winter of the painting's twilit evening, and thought of fall evenings long ago, years when his father would take him and his sister trick-or-treating. He and Sara used to take turns carrying a folded artist's stool along with their candy bags for when their father got tired and needed to rest, which was usually at every house. As the long night of house-to-house waned, Ben would try to walk more slowly, self-consciously copying his father's eternal limp, dragging his right leg deliberately through the heaps of leaves on the side of the road as if only for the joy of crunching leaves beneath his foot, but really, as the evening grew darker and the circle of trees drew the horizon closed like a drawstring bag around them, tightening the early evening sky with wrinkles of naked branches, he was thumping out his father's perpetual four-legged pace: left leg, two crutches, bad foot, left leg, two crutches, bad foot, left leg, two crutches, bad foot. His father, he thought as he looked at the painting, had probably wished he could fly.

Ben stared more closely at the painting. It had been over fifteen years since he had last seen it. There was no way it was the same one. Artists often paint the same picture over and over again, he told himself, thinking of Sara in her paint-splattered apartment. Even the idea that it might be theirs was just a momentary deception, like the people on the street or at the cocktail hour, dead ringers for his parents only because he wanted them to be.

Ben breathed out slowly and took one last look before turning again to leave, this time for good. But then he noticed, in the painting's lower right-hand corner, a tiny glossy area that gleamed white under the gallery lights—the same place where Sara, at the age of seven, had once tried to coat the painting with clear nail polish until their parents caught her. And then Ben's entire body started shaking with rage.

the obligatory seven seconds before someone changed the subject, a ritual deeply familiar to people whose parents die young.

He read the label again, still stunned. On loan, it read, from a Russian museum. He stretched his arms toward the painting without even noticing that he was doing so, reaching for it, ready to grip the bottom of the frame like the rung of a ladder. In his mind he saw his feet walking up the wall until he could step into it, sliding through the frame and out and up and away. Instead he caught a glimpse of his own hands out of the corner of his eye and stopped himself, lowering his arms and turning his head to see if anyone was still around.

No one was there, not even a lingering guard.

Strange things happen to paintings that no one looks at. They start to sing. In the absence of people, the empty room reverberated with the colors humming on its walls. Ben stood alone and listened as each wide flash of color vibrated at a different pitch: wistful wavering high notes for the airborne woman, deep resonating low tones for the Lovers in Blue. The dark little picture rattled the air with the banging of piano keys like the ones that once lay below it in his parents' living room, a minor chord struck by accident in the middle of a song.

He stepped closer.

With all his strength, he grabbed the painting's thin frame and yanked the whole thing off the wall. It was so light that he nearly flew backward. And then he left.

Dara Horn teaches at Sarah Lawrence College and is finishing up her dissertation on Yiddish and Hebrew Literature at Harvard University. Her first novel, *In the Image*, was published in 2002.

Excerpted from the forthcoming novel The World to Come *by Dara Horn. Copyright © 2006 by Dara Horn. With permission of the publisher, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.*

Joan Snyder

PAINTING PIONEER

Joan Snyder is an avowed feminist who is part of the first generation of women artists to identify themselves as such. The Jewish Museum notes that along with Miriam Schapiro and others, Snyder "strove to tame the heroic gestures of male-dominated Abstract Expressionism into a new intimate painterly language."

Snyder was a founding member of the feminist art group the Heresies Collective in the 1970s, and she claims a distinct female sensibility in her work, which she once characterized as "layers, words membranes, cotton, cloth, rope, repetition, bodies, wet, opening, closing…lists, life stories, grids, houses, intimacy, doorways…." When the neoexpressionist movement lauded its male stars in the 1980s, Snyder wrote an essay about the women painters who had pioneered self-expression in their art. Its title: "It Wasn't Neo to Us."

She has said, "When I started to paint, it was like speaking for the first time." Many of the paintings in this show give voice to Jewish experiences, "Women in Camps" and "Study for Morning Requiem with Kaddish" in particular.

Born in Highland Park New Jersey in 1940, Joan Snyder now lives in Brooklyn and Woodstock, New York. **Joan Snyder: A Painting Survey, 1969-2005**, an exhibition that features 31 major works, is on view the Jewish Museum in New York until October 23, 2005 (*thejewishmuseum.org*), and at the Danforth Museum of Art in Framingham, Massachusetts November 10, 2005 through February 5, 2006 (*Danforthmuseum.org*). And watch for the new book *Joan Snyder*, by Hayden Herrera (Abrams, 2005). ●

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Opposite: *And Always Searching for Beauty*, 2001, oil, acrylic, papier-mâché, herbs on linen, 78 x 102 inches. Collection of the Francis Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, 2001.

Above: Joan Snyder in black vest in front of her painting *For Mom*. Photo by Marni Horwitz.

Right: *Flesh/Art*, 1973, oil, acrylic, thread, needle, seeds on canvas, 24 x 24 inches. Collection of Richard and Terry Albright.

Below: *Ah, Sunflower*, 1994, oil, acrylic, papier-mâché, cheesecloth, herbs, and wood on canvas, 74 x 111 inches (with 4" shelf). Collection of Roger N. Mayer.

Judith the Obscure

(Preparing Ourselves to Meet Another Matriarch)

by Rivy Poupko Kletenik

As Jews, looking out at the world can be at times alienating. But thankfully the latest *tchatchke* on the market is here to the rescue. Buy now before the December rush, when the decor at your local shopping center tends to get a smidgen more distancing. Now on sale at your local Judaica store are "Holoday Specs: They make the whole world Jewish!" Here's how they work: put on the hologram-creating cardboard spectacles with their plastic lenses and—voila!—Christmas lights now appear in the shape of Jewish stars!! A neat trick. But instead of trying to see something Jewish in something that is clearly not, why not try to see more about what is truly Jewish?

Often what has become invisible through the ages is the female experience. To see a significant and meaningful place for women in the Hanukkah celebration, one needs to perhaps don another pair of glasses. Let's call them halakhic glasses. These spectacles allow us to gaze at the vast body of rich Jewish legal literature. They sometimes reveal that which you least expect.

Let us begin by opening the Shulchan Aruch, Code of Jewish Law, authored by Rabbi Yosef Karo in the sixteenth century. In section 970 we find the first law concerning Hanukkah. He starts with the simple; Hanukkah is for eight days, beginning on the 25th of Kislev. These are days when eulogies and fasting are prohibited, but work is permitted, except for women, who are to abstain from doing any form of labor while the candles are burning. Further on, he writes that women are obligated in lighting Hanukkah candles and may light on behalf of the entire household.

Two interesting points jump out. First, though the laws of Hanukkah go on for pages, it is women's custom that immediately takes center stage. The only labor prohibited on the festival is by women—during the burning of the Hanukkah candles. The second significant halakhic twist is that, in spite of the principle that women are exempt from positive time-bound commandments, when it comes to the lighting of the Hanukkah candles women are just as much obligated as men.

Questions: Why do women refrain from work while the Hanukkah candles burn? Why do they seem to have a higher level of commitment, or perhaps reverence for the Hanukkah lights? And finally, why are they obligated to light Hanukkah candles at all?

Keep your halakhic glasses on as we zoom back in time to search the pages of the Talmud for Rabbi Karo's source. Opening to page 23a of Tractate Shabbat we find that "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says that women are obligated in the mitzvah of Hanukkah lights, for they too were involved in the miracle." They too were involved in the miracle? Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, Rashi, tenth century scholar, suggests two possible interpretations to the puzzling phrase. First, they too were involved in the miracle; they too were subjugated to the Greeks at the time of the Maccabees, but in a terribly tragic way particular to women only. Each Jewish virgin was forced to be with a Greek officer before marrying. Second possibility; it was through a woman that the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days occurred. This provocative comment is enlarged upon by Rashi's grandson Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, Rashbam, he adds, that the Hanukkah miracle was done through the hands of Yehudit, Judith.

A Hannukah miracle, **executed by a woman.**

Ah, Judith the Obscure! To uncover her mystery, we must do some pasting together of Apocrypha, midrash and poetry. The reconstruction of this episode may never be completely satisfying, but what does emerge is a tale of heroism and sacrifice. It is unclear whether it is Judith the widow who goes forth willingly or Judith the bride who is taken by force, but, once alone with the Greek general she feeds him wine and cheese. She waits for the soporific meal to take its effect, cuts off his head, places it in her basket and ever so nonchalantly she returns to the Judean camp. Officers, troops and

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What is interesting is that the Twelfth-Century piyyut—poem—traditionally read on the shabbat of Hanukkah, tells the Hanukkah story differently than other sources (let's say, the *Al Hanisim* prayer or the passage in the Talmud). This has a long narrative about Judith. Here are a few lines I have translated from the medieval Hebrew:

In purity she went to the mikvah...
But first she would have to lie with the general...
They gathered for the Hasmonean daughter of Yochanan
For her chuppah to celebrate...
But no one could gaze at her
So heavy was the horror
She stood like a naked prostitute
How will she endure the torment?...
She cut off his head like a sheaf of wheat...

Basically it tells her story, which is pretty cool for a traditional source read on shabbat.

—*RPK*

soldiers of the Greek camp are left in leaderless disarray and with a breach enabling the smaller Judean army to triumph.

And thus the miracle was truly executed by a woman.

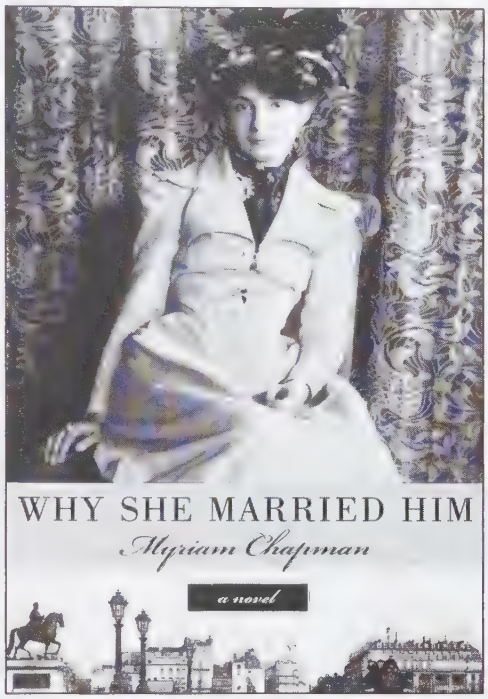
Now what do we see? Is this our usable past? I think so. This legend about Judith, together with the halakhic practice concerning the candles, has bequeathed to women a powerful symbol. Yes, we were victims; but we were also heroes. We are part of the miracle. We were oppressed, but we joined together with our brothers to fight back. Yehudit, Judith, is enshrined forever in sculpture, art work, librettos, and novels. Her memory is recalled on the shabbat of Hanukkah when traditionally we recite a lengthy twelfth-century *piyyut*, a poem, describing the pathos of her wedding and youthful fears of what awaited her. Let each and every woman light a Hanukkah menorah, refrain from work, watch the flames and remember. Let us see in those flames both the pain of our ancestors and the courage of their actions—and for this I do not think that we will need any kind of glasses.

Rivy Poupko Kletenik is Judaic Principal of the Seattle Hebrew Academy.

WHY SHE MARRIED HIM

—A Novel—

MYRIAM CHAPMAN



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—ALICE KAPLAN,
author of *The Interpreter* and *French Lessons: A Memoir*

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Three boys at a soup kitchen in the Lodz ghetto, on 22 Zarnenhof Street.

PHOTOGRAPHYER UNKONW/USHMM. COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY

"...And We Eat Like on Yom Kippur"

Women, Food and the Struggle for Survival in the Lodz Ghetto

by Helene Sinnreich

Reports from Darfur and Niger this season record horrific images of death and destruction, including photographs of the slow agony of human wasting that predicts imminent death. Within weeks of being cut off from food, people begin to die of starvation—no other killing necessary—yet this slow pause before the death tolls rise often garners less attention that the dramatic destruction of human lives by bloodier means.

The same was largely true of the Nazi policy of genocidal starvation of Jewish populations. Though books and films have described other forms of Jewish resistance—the wielding of weapons (usually by men) in the ghettos and forests, for example—we are only beginning to know about the battles fought each day (mostly by women) against the inexorable encroachment of hunger once food supplies were choked off. This agonizing fight for enough to eat to survive was a core resistance effort by women in the Jewish ghettos the Nazis created.

These battles are documented through small, unassuming artifacts: recipes, wartime diaries, songs from the ghetto, photographs and the testimony of survivors. While the Nazi regime degraded their bodies and souls with increasingly harsh restrictions, they were physically sustained by the women who tried to make miracles in empty kitchens. Here, Helene Sinnreich's research on some of the extraordinary practices.

The Nazis entered Lodz, a city with a pre-war Jewish population greater than that of the Netherlands, Italy and Denmark combined, in September of 1939. Within six months, a ghetto was established in the poorest area of the city. The Nazis sealed the ghetto, cutting off food and aid from the outside world. The Jews who lived there quickly began to succumb to enforced starvation. A battle for survival in the form of acquiring food ensued. In many cases, the heroes were women.

Early in the war, women found creative ways to put food on the table when their previously well-stocked pantries were empty. Basic war rations like ersatz "coffee," made from grains, became popular replacements for flour. A cake recipe from the Lodz Ghetto calls for 12-15 spoons of ersatz coffee, three potatoes, two spoons of flour, 10 saccharine tablets, one spoon of drinking soda, and a little salt. Ersatz coffee could also be used to stretch traditional dishes where the ingredients were missing. For example, potato latkes. Women living in the ghetto made this traditional Eastern European Jewish dish—normally made of flour, potatoes and eggs—by combining coffee and potatoes with a little flour. They found that the coffee-based dough could be stretched even further by adding cooked and ground vegetable leaves. One survivor noted that the water used to cook the leaves could be re-used to make soup—turning into nourishment what had once been considered waste.

These recipes were not all original to the ghetto. Finding ways to stretch meager food allotments had been forced upon various Jewish populations during World War I and the Great Depression. As in these other times of hardship, the women of the ghettoes learned to sacrifice and innovate in order to fight for their own and their families' survival. One recipe called for beet leaves to be salted and fried and turned into "herring." When even imaginative cooking couldn't fill the table, women routinely sacrificed their own rations to the family food pot. And as in times before the war, women helped each other to find the means to feed their families. Neighbors borrowed a spoonful of flour or a few ounces of noodles from each other, promising to return the items when the next ration was distributed.

Breaking Kashrut to Save a Life

As starvation set in, the Jews who were squeezed into the ghetto ate foods which under better circumstances they would never have consumed. Pork and horsemeat (strictly taboo for the Lodz Jews, most of whom, before the war, had observed the laws of kashrut) became hoarded, life-saving delicacies. Not only did ghetto Jews begin to eat whatever non-kosher meat they could find, but a rabbinical decision in the Lodz ghetto even made it permissible under Jewish law for certain persons to eat it—the ill, pregnant women and the like. This development led to new phrases in the language. Robert Moses Shapiro, in an article "Yiddish Slang Under the Nazis," says that "If a Jew in the Lodz ghetto saw someone running he might comment that '*er est vishtshinove ferd*'—he eats race-horses."

One recipe from the ghetto called for making five large cutlets from 200 grams of horsemeat, two shredded potatoes and a bit of rye flour, and seasoning with salt and pepper. The cutlets were then fried in a little oil. When there was no cooking oil, motor oil was sometimes used. Meatballs made from horsemeat became a popular commodity, found primarily on the black market. A ghetto song describes this "delicacy," recounting that their taste had to be masked by drinking saccharine-sweetened tea. Another song laments the plight of the many ghetto Jews who sold off the last of their possessions to purchase whatever food was available: *"I've already sold the cabinet and my mother-in-law's bed. I'll get bread and butter and horsemeat meatballs."* People often sold off their possessions to obtain food, sometimes on the black market.. Most people utilizing the Lodz ghetto black market traded items from their official rations, selling more valuable portions such as meats and fats, for a larger quantity of less valuable items, such as vegetables. People who managed to grow or sell processed foods such as "candy" made from saccharine could make a trade on the black market. Although the Jewish administration frowned on the black market—particularly "middlemen" profiteering off the selling of food—a daily record of prices on the market was kept. Not only do the prices reflect what was available in the official rations, but they are indicators of the community's mindset. As waves of fear rose—when there were deportations out of the ghetto to the unknown—black market prices spiked too.

The refuse dump became a life-saving cache of nutrients.

Scavenging for Sustenance

With the sealing of the ghettos, food became even more scarce, and people began to seek new edibles and more ways—beyond potatoes and coffee substitute—to stretch their limited food supply. Jews in the Lodz ghetto began to consume foods which, before the war, had been animal fodder. Hunger drove people to eat rotting vegetables, peels and dead outer leaves of cabbages. They found that you could eat these if you cooked them, and these items quickly became precious staples. Potato peels, in particular, became an important part of the ghetto diet. As time went on, though, even these remnants became so scarce that, at one point in the Lodz ghetto, a doctor's prescription was needed to get a coveted ration of potato peels. Bella Karp, a survivor of this ghetto, described eating "bread" made from ground up peels, and, in even more desperate times, making patties out of the hard outer shells of coffee beans.

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Finding something—anything—that could provide nourishment went beyond merely rescuing food scraps from one's own kitchen. The refuse dump became a life-saving cache of nutrients, an important resource for the ghetto dinner table. As Lodz ghetto diarist Oskar Rosenfeld, writing before his death in the ghetto tells us, it was children who went "through this trash, crawling and scratching around, fishing something out and sticking it in their pocket or in a pot." The more desperate would attempt to eat food that had been doused with chlorine. Photographer Henryk Ross in his post-war testimony told how a batch of rotten potatoes were doused in chlorine and buried, to prevent starving people from consuming them and getting sick. Children dug up the potatoes and ate them anyway. According to Ross, "...they were so hungry that it didn't matter to them what they ate."

Jews in the ghetto ate discarded meat as a last resort. They even ate meat that was in a state of advanced decay. In August of 1941, a freight car of meat—rotting and already covered with worms after a three-days' journey through the summer heat—arrived in the ghetto. Nevertheless, it was turned into sausages and fed to the factory workers, many of whom then fell ill from food poisoning. And records from a court case in the Lodz ghetto depict a number of people eating a horse designated for burial that had been doused in chlorine to prevent consumption. The convicted Jews pleaded that they had stolen the meat to relieve their desperate hunger.

Making Something out of Nothing

Jews survived day to day in this hell through determination and innovation. As food sources deteriorated, people began attempts at food production. One survivor noted: "...because of the intense hunger, people began to plant things on rooftops, window sills, backyards. Each vacant spot was used for planting." Plants sprouting up in corners and alleys nourished broken spirits and filled hungry bellies. The Jewish ghetto administration tried to encourage some of these planting efforts. In May of 1940, land parcels in the ghetto were made available for growing vegetables. In June of 1942, it was announced that fruit trees and shrubs could be leased from the ghetto's Department of Agriculture. In addition, in one area of the Lodz ghetto, there were communal garden plots, which were farmed by youth groups including Zionists, Bundists and others. In the early days, the ghetto administration even worked towards providing matzah and other kosher foods for Passover.

The most innovative food production in the ghetto, described by Oskar Singer, was the ghetto "salad." The ghetto dairy, having run out of milk to distribute, gathered the scraps left over from the ghetto kitchens and turned them into an edible mix. Leftover scraps of wilted vegetable leaves were soaked until they appeared regenerated, and the edible bits that could be salvaged from rotten vegetables were soaked until their smell diminished. These re-hydrated greens were mixed with unblemished pieces of moldy bread, and well-seasoned with spices to mask the smell. This ghetto salad was served to inhabitants "fortunate" enough to have a ration coupon for it.

Lodz ghetto survivor Lucille Eichengreen explained the plight of the starving Jews of the ghetto: "We went to almost any length to get something edible, a bite to eat, rancid or not, and still we were hungry." ●

Fantasies about Food

Helene Sinnreich talks with Lilith's Leah Kaplan:

I am often asked about the thesis of Cara de Silva's 1996 book *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezin,* which holds that the women's recording and recounting of recipes in concentration camp was a way to resist Nazi persecution. I have great respect for the publication of these recipes. I think that *In Memory's Kitchen* is an important document and a last testament of sorts of the women incarcerated in Theresientstadt. However, I believe that in her introduction framing the documents, de Silva romanticizes the recording of the recipes as a form of resistance.

While I have argued that taking action and working to provide food is an act of resistance, I believe the writing of elaborate recipes was a form of food fantasy, which is a common symptom of starvation. Many starving people wrote obsessively about food in their diaries, including chronicling food prices, food rations, and detailing how they acquired food. Street musician Yankele Hershkowitz sang in the Lodz ghetto, "Why have you abandoned us, little bread...you torture us constantly without pity, we are already close to death."

Many ghetto writers felt that focusing on food was psychologically damaging, even deadly. They contended that those who obsessed about food were those who were getting close to complete collapse from starvation. Ghetto inmate Oskar Rosenfeld recorded one woman who said, "We don't talk about eating....Hungry people who talk themselves into the illusion that they've been eating well often show signs of serious nervous disorders and become quite wild at night..." Though it sounds more poetic and respectful to claim that starvation fantasy was a form of resistance rather than a psychological disorder as a result of lack of food, the victims themselves originated this theory that fantasy was a symptom of mental breakdown. The heroism of *In Memory's Kitchen* endures nevertheless. It lies in the power of each voice surviving its writer as testament to the existence of life in the midst of savage destruction.

Helene J. Sinnreich is Director of Jewish and Holocaust Studies at Youngstown State University. She spent three years in Poland researching Nazi starvation policy in the Lodz ghetto.

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Shema

by Helena Lipstadt

Helena Lipstadt lives in Gulport FL. "Shema" was written during a residency at the Arad Arts Project in Israel.

Hear oh Israel
a tale of Oneness
One of us right
One of us wrong

Here in this land
bought and sold
traded won stolen
here my mothers are
buried here
Mohammed stepped off
to paradise
here your child is buried
your house
destroyed

Here I was cast into a pit
sold into slavery
here you turned me from the gate
here I sent you packing
moved into your house

Here my son learns
weaponry
here your son casts
stones
here you blew yourself
to bits killing us
both

one God only One

Here my house is
surrounded by soldiers
Here in my holy proximity
to the grave of my fathers
Here you live in a ghetto
curfewed carded
shamed
Here I torture you
for secrets Here
you torture me

Hear oh Israel a tale
of Oneness
one of us is right one
of us wrong

Here I kill you to rebuild
the Temple
Here you kill me to get
to Heaven

One God Only One

Disputed Ruins (Ours) by Leah Kaplan

Last year, one hilltop community in Galilee was embroiled over a proposal to build new Jewish houses near an old Arab cemetery left abandoned in 1948. As some Jews fought to preserve these sacred ruins in their midst, archaeologists found ruins of a third community—an ancient Jewish village buried beneath the tombstones.

In a land that devours its inhabitants
dawn breaks
cups and plates
and bones
that are buried in every mountaintop
amidst the roots
in layers.
"They are our shards." "No ours—"
we argue from our perches
on hills of exile
or return from exile

As we pick among the ruins
we avoid
their
pots and figurines
kitchen utensils and idolatry
one child's-breadth above or below
ours
in the tel

Leah Kaplan, an artist and writer in Manhattan, spent last year in Jerusalem as a Dorot Fellow, studying at the Pardes Institute and volunteering as an ambulance assistant for Magen David Adom.

Lilith's 10th annual look at Jewish books for young readers

How Do We Become Grown-Up Jewish Women?

Naomi Danis *asked each of these writers to look into her own life as a girl and name a turning point, that moment when she first saw herself as an adult.*

You A re SO Not Invited to My Bat Mitzvah*

She was the kind of girl with no patience. She ate the gingerbread house while it was under construction. She wondered if there were guns in heaven. And, if so, could you die there all over again? She wanted to trade all the cars in for horses, but what she really wanted was a pet monkey. She was my absolute best friend in the world. Her name was Miranda, and when we were both eight years old she died.

I knew something was wrong with her and that she was sick, but I didn't know she had been actively dying since before the moment we first set eyes on each other. I wonder sometimes if she kept her leukemia from me on purpose, as if saving me from some burden. Without my realizing it, her sickness was part of our life together. I walked when I wanted to run, I sat when I wanted to stand. Her legs were too tired to do much of anything. But I didn't much notice. I just wanted to be with her.

For two weeks every summer, I had to go away with my father. That summer we went to Montauk and stood on the beach watching a hurricane roll toward us like bad breath. I drew our pictures in the sand and he etched in the captions above them. At the local store I discovered chair hammocks, licorice pipes, wax lips and WOW magazine. My father discovered the lady behind the counter.

When I returned, my mother took me for ice cream. We sat in the backyard of the creamery counting the airplanes that flew overhead. In the course of our conversation I counted five planes and she told me, gently, that while I was playing on the beach and discovering wax candy my best friend had died. While she talked, I curled my neck over the back of my chair so my face was flush against the sky, away from her and the world. I watched the airplanes and I wondered if Miranda found any guns in heaven. I had missed her funeral. I stared straight up; the sky was all I could see. If I strained, I could see out of my peripheral, my mother's face and things freezing behind glass.

As my mother tucked me in that night, she explained something that I've carried with me ever since. She said that in Judaism death is not a tragedy but a natural process. And that because I was Miranda's friend, and because she had died, it was up to me to speak for her and honor her life by sharing my memories. That way, Miranda would live on, not only in my memory, but in the memories of others. This honoring, she said, was called, *k'vod ha-chai*. My despair had an outlet. And my sense of Jewish identity solidified right there, at eight years old, lying in my canopy bed.

When I wrote *You Are SO Not Invited to My Bat Mitzvah*, it was with Miranda in mind. It became another way for me to pass along the memory of her through story. And so now I pass it along to you to help remember the spirit of a girl who ate the gingerbread house while it was being built.

Fiona Rosenbloom grew up in Rye, New York. She is the author of *You Are SO Not Invited to My Bat Mitzvah* (Hyperion, 2005). She lives in Brooklyn.

**The title of each writer's latest book.*

My Sister's Wedding

Hannah Goodman

I had just finished my first year of teaching and was seated next to my principal in her office, part of my first-year evaluation.

She leaned over the paper work—so close that I smelled her Chanel perfume, heard the jingle of her large gold earrings, and saw several fine grey hairs that didn't get bathed in honey-blond dye.

"So, this first year went well?" she asked.

I nodded.

She continued, her frosted pink lips stretched into a smile. "But it must be hard for you....being...one of the only...you know...."

I blinked.

She continued to smile and without a second of hesitation, she said. "I mean, well, you know you're the only one—besides Mr. Fineberg—"

I think my eyebrows flew off my head. I got it immediately.

Embarrassment flooded my body as I stammered, "No, no. I have no problems. Really. Everyone is really nice." Suddenly her office phone buzzed and she told me to come back at the end of the day to finish our "talk."

At the time, I tucked the incident far into my mind—so much so, that I can't recall what happened when I went back to finish our little "talk."

It wasn't until a few years later—my days at that school long gone—that this moment resurfaced.

I was editing a scene from my book *My Sister's Wedding*, where my main character, Maddie, reflects on her relationship with the very loud and pushy Susan. Maddie flashes back to grammar school, when they first became friends. Susan, herself a half-Jew, once defended Maddie to the popular clique who declared Maddie "too Jewish" to hang out with. Susan, full of piss and vinegar, hustles up to them and shames them for their prejudice. For this mitzvah, Susan is thus declared a "Jew lover" and branded with a figurative scarlet J. While this scene demonstrates why Maddie feels forever indebted to Susan, as I reread this moment in the novel, I was struck by Susan's bravery.

I hadn't read the scene in quite awhile and the moment in my boss' office, years before, came rushing back, loud and fierce like a tidal wave.

And as I relived the moment, the parts my mind chose to remember, I realized that I created this character, cushioned her with Jewish friends, gave her a brave friend to stick up for her because I was missing that in my life—as a teen and as an adult. I used my writing to create people who are better, braver, wiser, gutsier than I, so that I can forgive myself for not being the person I wish I were.

Hannah R. Goodman is the author of the award-winning YA novel, *My Sister's Wedding* (IUniverse, 2004). A former high school English teacher and now at-home-working mommy, she teaches her home-grown writing course Releasing the Writer Within in Rhode Island. www.hannahrgoodman.com

Jews in America

Marilyn Sachs

If I had to pick one person who helped me define what a Jewish woman was, or should be, it was my grandmother. As a child, I was ashamed of her—she didn't look anything like the grandmother in *Heidi*, she had an accent, bargained fiercely with the kosher butcher, and was the powerful matriarch in the family who brooked no dissent. During Passover, it was not my grandfather who prevailed; it was my grandmother, commanding all the women in the kitchen, arranging the small apartment to hold hordes of relatives, and ignoring the children who dressed up in the grown-ups' clothes, and played quietly under the table while the men prayed. Although not a particularly observant Jew, one of the holidays that I always observe is Passover.

My grandmother told stories. Not Cinderella stories, but stories about life in the old country, stories about curses, pogroms, and her flight to the land where the streets were supposed to be lined with gold.

I became a writer before she died, and my first three books were about a Jewish family very much like my own. Other of

my books deal with Jews who, like my grandmother, came to America: *Call Me Ruth*, and most recently *Lost in America*.

I once tried to put her into a book with Joan of Arc (*A December Tale*) but she was too powerful for Joan, so I had to take her out.

Her stories are with me still. I just hope she lets me use them.

Marilyn Sachs has written over 40 books for children. Her most recent is *Lost In America* (Roaring Brook Press, 2005). She won the American Jewish Library Award for *Call Me Ruth*.

The Last Days of Dogtown

When I was a moody, misunderstood high school freshman in Denver, one of the juniors I knew from my public school chorus talked me into going to a MoVFTY event in exotic Omaha. MoVFTY, the Missouri Valley Federation of Temple Youth, was the midwest branch of the Reform Movement's youth program.

Ralph told me not to worry about the fact that I wasn't really friends with anyone in my own temple youth group. He said that regional events were where I would meet people who would change my life: teachers and rabbis and kids who were as smart and creative and funny as me. He flattered me shamelessly and proceeded to sell the plan to my mother, who signed the permission forms.

One event was all it took. I stayed up all night talking with a universe of new best friends.

I wrote, directed and acted in little plays on weighty themes. I learned to play the guitar and became a song leader. I helped lead creative services.

It was in NFTY that I learned the *Sh'ma* and heard *Birkat Hamazon* sung for the first time, and had my first experience of sleep-away camp, where I connected nature and Judaism. I also fell in love with hunky Jewish boys—sometimes twice in a single weekend.

Before my youth group experience, Jewishness had meant the Holocaust, plus a sense of pride bound up with a vague

Esme Raji Codell

In her autobiographical book about her school days in Chicago, Codell talks about her dismay with Hebrew School after she is the one who, smartly and secretly, finds the afikomen at a communal seder:

Throughout the evening, I saw the heads of boys in the rows of guests disappear, and then reappear some minutes later, their mouths twisted with disappointment. I was at first very pleased with myself for acting so quickly, but then a worry made its way into my mind. Did or did not the rabbi say that the *boy* who took the afikomen could have anything? Would it matter that a girl had taken it? Were girls not supposed to want prizes? Had I behaved in an unladylike way? If it wasn't meant for a girl, was it like stealing? Would the rabbis be angry? Would I be punished? Should I put it back? I watched as another boy's head reappeared, and felt myself harden. No, I decided, I won't put it back. It wasn't fair to offer anything in the world just to boys, and I would tell them so. Better, I would show them so. I looked at the clock. I was feeling exhausted from all the worry.

Finally, when I thought the evening would never end, the last song was sung. The old rabbi stood up and the room grew quiet. "And now," he said, "I will check under my chair to see if any boy was *brave* enough, *clever* enough, to steal the afikomen." He looked under his chair. "It's gone!" he exclaimed. Everyone moaned and applauded. I felt myself start to quake.

From *Sing a Song of Tuna Fish: Hard to Swallow Stories from Fifth Grade*, (Hyperion 2004).

burden of obligation, and little else. NFTY provided me with models of girls as leaders—board members and event chairs and presidents—who were cool, competent and comfortable in their Jewish skins. It also connected my Jewish soul with my American identity—and joy.

Anita Diamant is the author (most recently) of *The Last Days of Dogtown (Scribner, 2005)*, a novel, and (most famously) of *The Red Tent*. She has written six nonfiction guides to Jewish practice, starting with *The New Jewish Wedding*, and is president of Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh and Education Center in Boston.

I'm eight years old and I'm sitting on a hillside overlooking a picture-perfect lake that shimmers in the pinkish light of a Maine dusk. I am nestled amongst 399 other girls, aged eight through15, and no one makes a peep except the birds above us in the elm branches, as the head of camp blesses the Shabbat lights. We all whisper "Amen" when she is done, in unison, so it sounds as if it comes from the ground itself.

The head of camp nods ever so slightly to two campers, older girls with long blown out hair, who have been sitting nervously beside her, waiting to participate in the service.

One of them rises. "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood," she begins, and I am rapt with attention. "Two roads diverged in a wood and I—I took the one less traveled by," she concludes a few moments later, "and that has made all the difference." The phrase "the road less traveled makes the difference" resonates in my eight-year-old imagination so that even now my feeling of being Jewish and my penchant for taking risks, both in my writing and in my life, have somehow become intertwined.

The girl who read the poem sits, clearly relieved, and the other girl stands. She has the easier job, reading from the Xeroxed sheet we will use every Friday night for the Shabbat service on the hill that I will attend for the next seven summers:

"Thou shalt love the Lord, your God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might." I know this prayer. I've heard it before in Temple, and I join along with the other campers. "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart." I don't even know what all the words mean, but I feel their power and direction as I recite them with the others.

When we are done saying the *Shma* it is time for silent devotion. Marina, the music counselor, plays some minor chords on the electric organ set up on the hill.

I'm frightened because it is my first night at sleep-away camp, but I am calmed by this moment when we have come together for Shabbat, a familiar tradition as it is something I have always celebrated with my own family at home.

Now it is time to sing "The Sabbath Prayer" from Fiddler on the Roof: "May you be like Ruth and like Esther. May you be deserving of praise." I'm not clear who Ruth and Esther are, but I am clear that I feel content to be among these girls, and I hope to grow up one day to be a smart, capable Jewish woman like the head of camp, like Marina at the organ, like Ruth and Esther, like my own mother. And as I look across the hill, out towards the lake all silver and black in the gathering twilight, I know that one day I will be.

Isabel Rose's first novel, *The J.A.P. Chronicles*, was published this summer by Doubleday. She co-wrote and starred in the 2004 release *Anything But Love*, available on video and DVD. www.IsabelRose.com

It figures that the moment I felt fully realized as a Jewish woman involved food.

What was it that marked my transformation from confused Jewish girl to equally confused (but for different reasons) Jewish woman? A seder. The first seder I hosted for my parents in *my* home. Come to think of it, there was another Rubicon crossed that year—I finally got to sit at the grown-up table. I can't help thinking that being over 30 with a little tyke of my own had something to do with it.

Why did that seder feel like such a rite of passage? After all,

I'd thrown black-tie dinner parties that I'd catered myself (I've been diagnosed with chronic *Martha Stewartitis*). I think the exact moment of my transformation to Jewish grownup—or more specifically, Jewish mother (oy!), came before the festive meal, when my mother gave me a seder plate of my very own. It made me conscious of being a link in a chain stretching back through the generations.

I realized that being a grown-up isn't just a matter of getting to sit a different table at the seder. It's about taking on the responsibility to keep the chain unbroken. It's about merging the traditions of my kids' dad's family (Sephardi charoset with dates, hazelnuts and coconut) with those of my own (Ashkenazi charoset with apples, walnuts and sickly sweet Manischewitz) to keep them all alive.

Sarah Darer Littman is the author of *Confessions of a Closet Catholic* (Dutton, 2005), about a Jewish girl who, inspired by her Catholic friend, gives up being Jewish for Lent. She is a columnist for the Greenwich (CT) Times as well as an occasional commentator for NPR.

House on the River: A Summer Journey

To be grown-up implies a place of arrival, but I am a work in progress, humbled daily by what I cannot accept or understand. Here, my children have been my teachers. They frequently hear the words "I don't know" and, alas, "I'm sorry." And they understand—I hope—that although I have many unwavering principles, the interpretation of those principles may be surprisingly porous: In the house of Israel that my husband and I invent daily, a teenager's sound argument can undo the fiat. Rather easily!

Having attained a half century, I know that I grow closer to meeting my Creator, which makes me feel less completed than ever, thankfully. "As God is merciful, so be you also merciful." I try to amplify my compassion, as I seek the shelter of God's compassion; I will need it when my deeds are weighed.

What sustains me increasingly is the wisdom of women. I have grown even closer to my astonishing sisters and friends, whose profundity and grace fill me with delight. My latest spiritual goals are to know a tarnished human being when I meet one, instead of too many years later, and to laugh. (The clearest distinction between my young self and my current one is my capacity to laugh at just about anything.)

The other attainment I celebrate is my embrace of my family and my past. I was one of many who fled the city of her birth; I will not return. But I have returned, within, to a pure thanksgiving for what my family bequeathed me—and to an expanding forgiveness for whatever went awry. My husband and I can shepherd our children because of the gifts and sacrifice of those who came before us.

So Much for Gratitude

Mother: No, you can't pierce your ears; I'm against it Jewishly.

Daughter (age 11)**:** Mom!

Mother: In the Torah, how does a slave show the world he'd rather stay with his master than be free? He pierces his ear!

Daughter: I'm not a slave.

Mother: You're a work of creation.

Daughter: You streak your hair.

Mother: But that's not permanent, like tattooing or piercing.

Daughter: I promise I will never get a tattoo. Now can I have pierced ears?

Mother: I don't have them, Dad's sister doesn't have them, and neither do your grandmothers.

Daughter: All your sisters do.

[Consultation with father, who is adamantly opposed but agrees that it's not a moral issue and that we do not want daughter's adolescence dominated by argument over pierced ears.]

The united front: When you're 18.

[Ensuing and endless discussion of pierced ears]

Motherand father: After your bat mitzvah.

* * *

After bat mitzvah, mother accompanies daughter on P-day. Mother acknowledges to herself that, concession made and deed done, she can no longer invoke principle. Daughter is ecstatic. Mother expresses her own ecstasy that the issue of pierced ears will no longer govern the domestic discourse.

Daughter: Can I have a dog?

—Nessa Rapoport

Finally, and most severely, every day that I open the paper and see the evil that afflicts us, I am darkened by the state of the world. I am of the generation educated as Jews to know that in the hour of our people's most searing need, *ha-olam shatak*, the world was silent. Here I am, entirely an adult in this regard, a citizen of the gorgeous, fragile and fractured world given to us, struggling to cry out against the catastrophes that human beings afflict upon one another. And each of us God's most beloved creation.

So I waver between encompassing gratitude and the unceasing voice within that says not only "Never again" but "Never enough." The world is unredeemed; there is much to do.

Nessa Rapoport is the author of *Preparing for Sabbath*, one of the first novels of a young Jewish woman's spiritual quest; *A Woman's Book of Grieving*, a collection of her prose poems; and, most recently, *House on the River: A Summer Journey* (Harmony, 2004). She is married to artist Tobi Kahn.

The JGirl's Guide

I did not become a Jewish woman in my youth. It took me until I had been out of my parents' home for nearly 10 years. I never had a bat mitzvah and the extent of our observance was lighting Hanukkah candles and having a seder with my grandparents. Before I could become a Jewish woman, I had to become a real Jew first.

That happened when I went to Israel for the first time, at age 25, to study Hebrew. An Episcopalian friend in college had said to me, "You are studying the mythology and folklore of all the people in the world. Why don't you study your own myth, the Bible?" I knew he was right.

As I stood on the soil of Kibbutz Gedera, I witnessed the religiously observant inhabitants stopping their work in the fields near sunset to say their prayers. I stopped in my tracks and realized the full import of what I saw. If I were to stop being Jewish as my upbringing had encouraged me to do, I would lose this connection with eternity symbolized by the kibbutzniks before me.

For the next few years, I tumbled headlong into becoming a real Jew. I started lighting Shabbat candles, stopped eating milk and meat together, celebrated all the holidays, including Hanukkah and Pesach. My family stood by watching me become this "other" person.

Then came the night in Philadelphia when I was invited to celebrate "Women's Night in the Sukkah" with Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener. For most of us, it was the first time we had come together intentionally *as Jewish women* to have a meal together and celebrate. From that night, a group of us decided to start meeting once a month on the "new" holiday Andrea told us about: Rosh Hodesh, the Jewish new moon festival.

I became a Jewish woman when I led my first Rosh Hodesh gathering the following year. I had told the group I wanted to celebrate the bat mitzvah I never had as a girl. A friend in the group told me that leading a gathering would qualify.

"How could that be?" I asked. "I'm not even learning Torah."

"What do you mean? We learn Torah whenever we sing, dance, tell stories about our ancestors in the Torah, pray or paint in this Rosh Hodesh group."

A community of Jewish women was welcoming me into their midst. I had become a Jewish woman.

Penina Adelman's first book, *Miriam's Well*, helped launch the Rosh Hodesh movement. She is the author of *The Bible from Alef to Tav*, *The JGirl's Guide*, (Jewish Lights, 2005) co-authored with Ali Feldman and Shulamit Reinharz and *Praise Her Works: Conversations with Biblical Women (JPS, 2005).*

Closing the Sea

Since my childhood I have been proud of the deep-rooted Israeliness of my family—eight generations in the land, the family patriarch having arrived from Lithuania to Jerusalem in 1811.

www.Lilith.org

Growing up in a secular home, my identity as a Jewish female didn't concern me very much. The holidays at my parents' home were mainly occasions for festive meals. We didn't attend synagogue or fast on Yom Kippur. My parents celebrated my bat mitzvah with family and friends, attaching no religious significance. And whereas my two younger brothers learned a haftarah and had an aliyah in a synagogue, I wasn't bothered by this, and didn't feel I was deprived.

The only emotional connection to my identity as a Jewish woman came via the Shoah—when I read Anne Frank's *The Diary of Young Girl*, and other books about children in the Holocaust, I knew that if I had been born in a different place and a different time, my fate would have been the same as their fate, because of my Jewishness. I imagined myself living in the ghetto, in hiding, in a concentration camp. I remember asking myself, do I look Jewish? Would my blue eyes and small pug nose fool the Nazis into thinking I was Aryan, and would I possibly have been saved?

The first time I felt keenly my being a Jewish woman was at my mother's funeral. I was already 27 years old. I stood by the open grave with my two young brothers, and the two of them mumbled the Kaddish prayer, stumbling over the difficult Aramaic words. I remember the pain of my being unable to say Kaddish for my mother. After all, I was her eldest child, and why did the unfair Jewish laws deny me this privilege? I knew that if I read the prayer, I would have done so in a deliberate and clear voice, without mistakes.

It was this pain that I expressed through one of the characters in a play I wrote a few years later. "Dvora Baron," was performed at the Cameri Theater in Tel Aviv in 2000. Thought of as the first female Hebrew writer, Dvora Baron was the daughter of a rabbi from a village in Lithuania and was privileged to obtain from her father a boy's education. She also critiqued Judaism as a feminist early in the 20th century. Before her husband's funeral Dvora is discussing with two good friends which of them will say Kaddish. "He has a daughter, " says Tzipora, their daughter, "and I will say Kaddish for Father," And Dvora says bitterly, "You can't say Kaddish, Tziporaleh, not in our religion." When Dvora herself dies, at the end of the play, Tzipora stands at the edge of her bed and says Kaddish for her mother in a loud and clear voice. The play ends with the singing of Kaddish in the beautiful voice of Mirah Zakkai, the wonderful and best known opera singer in Israel. Thus did I compensate myself for not being able to say Kaddish for my mother, and I expressed my protest against the discrimination of women in Orthodox Judaism.

—translated from the Hebrew by ND

Judith Katzir was born in Haifa in 1963. She is a bestselling novelist in Israel, the author of two children's books, and works as an editor for Hakibbutz Hameuchad/Siman Kriah Publishing House,

I remember always having been a little Jewish girl, covering her eyes before the Shabbat candles on Friday night, and knowing her *Ma Nishtana* by heart at the age of three. I remember, more or less, the day I became a woman, but I will not share the details on this subject, and anyway it is not what you have asked me here.

The very expression *Jewish woman* raises so many questions in my mind. My God, how can one define such things? I never had a bat mitzvah. My religious marriage was a very bad idea, followed in its wake by several catastrophic years that culminated a divorce in front of a rabbi with a classic Yiddish accent. Nothing wonderful here that would make me a Jewish *woman*.

The army in Israel, perhaps? During these two years of service I did become an Israeli, I washed a record number of glasses and dishes. I grew, but I wasn't always being a Jewish woman.

And then, suddenly, an epiphany. But yes, of course! I have the date, the hour, and the proof! I know exactly where and when it happened! It was the 18th of August, 1996 in Paris, in the 16th arrondissement. On that day I fell, like a fool, in love with a little man, nearly bald, toothless, who drooled a bit. I thought I had never seen anyone so beautiful. So tender. So attractive. And so intelligent too, of course. I knew that I would spend my life loving him. On that day, in joy and pain, I became a mother. A Jewish mother, of course.

—translated from the French by ND

Valerie Zenatti, author of the memoir, *When I Was a Soldier* (Bloomsbury, 2005) was born in Nice, France in 1970 and made aliyah to Beersheva when she was 13. Now living in Paris, she is a translator, novleist and children's book author.

Longing for Love in Uniform

To the boys the army means girls and to the girls it means boys. In other words every girl (let's just take them as an example) is hoping that in that vast catalogue of boys 18 to 21 she'll find the one she's waiting for and who certainly seems to be taking his time turning up, the one who'll mean something like to this to her. "I'm a man, a real man, strong but sensitive, I'm here to protect you." And the others, the ones who already have a boyfriend, live in fear: they have nightmares every night that some ravishing soldier girl, some bombshell to die for in khaki, will bump into their boyfriend so far way and offer them a shoulder to cry on. Among other things, the army is our very own commedia dell'arte.

We're a nation of lunatics stranded between songs, the sea and war. A country in which death is conceivable from as early as eighteen, but this eventuality doesn't make anyone any more intelligent. A country where we're convinced that love lies waiting in those army bases surrounded by barbed wire, under a canvas tent, in a thick sleeping bag. This is my country, so I know and I understand all this almost physically.

...Shlomo Artzi is singing to me, telling me he's a soldier and that I shouldn't cry, me, the little girl. I suddenly think that in all, I mean absolutely, all the songs about the army, it's about a boy solider, never a girl soldier. As if I needed an extra reason to be depressed, there it is: Spend two years in the army, girls, but for pity's sake be discreet! Whatever you do, don't put in an appearance in any songs!

Army Survival Kit

[I receive] a sort of joke survival kit with loads of little packets which I have to open in a particular order. In each of them there's an explanatory note:

- A packet of condoms for emergency situations of affection
- Two packets of tissues for evenings of serious depression
- Leg-waxing kit which must be used before the emergency affection
- Aspirins to sooth my pig-headed head
- A torch to see the light at the end of the tunnel
- A big T-shirt with the words "two -year holiday" printed on it to give me sweet dreams
- A clown nose so that I can laugh at least once a day when I look at myself in the mirror
- 25 phone tokens to ring them at midnight to say, "I just have to tell you this...."
- A little photo album with the "best of" our photos so that I never forget I've got friends who are always there.

From Valerie Zenatti's *When I Was a Soldier: A Memoir* (Quand J'Etais Soldate, 2002) translated by Adriana Hunter (Bloomsbury, 2005)

Yentl's Revenge

It happened much later than, perhaps, most of the other rites of passage described on these pages, but adulthood certainly hadn't happened by means of my bat mitzvah—a fundamentally empty event involving a new dress, new bank account, and the same insecurities I'd had since before needing a bra. Over the seven years following that, I, like most kids who were raised with privilege, teetered on the strange border between childhood and adulthood—taking steps towards independence but not quite ready to stand on my own.

When I was 20 my mother was diagnosed with metastatic cancer, and for perhaps the first time I let needs other than my own dictate my priorities. I left behind a fun, romantic summer and came home to organize my mother's life around radiation. Autumn was divided between university and my native Chicago, and by the time I came back after final exams, it was already time to set up hospice. I served as my mother's primary caretaker. When she died I found myself turning to Jewish ritual, because I couldn't think of anything else to do.

By the time I emerged, first from shiva, then from a year's Kaddish, I was ineradicably changed—sadder, wiser. And, wide open in grief, the rituals and the liturgy managed somehow to penetrate, sending me back to shul again and again even after I had long discharged my mourner's duties. If the experience of my mother's dying and death brought me crashing into adulthood, and the months that followed brought me to Judaism, to a spiritual practice, to choosing to engage in a relationship with God. It was a rite of passage in every sense of the phrase.

Danya Ruttenberg is the editor of *Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism* (Seal Press) and studying for the rabbinate at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

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The Modern Jewish Girl's Guide to Guilt

When I was 15 I spent my junior year of high school in a small, cold city in the north of Israel. Desperate to flee the cows and orange groves, I would ascend to Jerusalem on weekends to hang out on Ben Yehuda. In the maze of alleyways that branched out from it, which I clung to like a tree of life, I found tea houses and book stores—perfect hangouts for an alienated teenage girl 10,000 miles away from home.

Strangely, I spent much of my time in Israel pondering how un-Jewish I felt. I looked at my peers and felt like I didn't fit in: my ambitions in life didn't include marrying my boyfriend from Camp Ramah or becoming the president of the local USY chapter—both venerated goals in the Los Angeles community I had been living in—or joining the Israeli army, as many of my American peers in Israel fantasized of doing after climbing Masada at dawn. That year, more than anything, I romanticized myself as a Jewish, female Holden Caufield, alone in all of my miserable, misunderstood glory.

Like the Wicked Child in the Passover Seder, I found myself repeatedly asking adults around me: Who are these people, the Jews, and what do they and their history mean to you? To you, and not to me. These Jews—from the religious, sanctimonious girls I knew at home, to the rabidly anti-Palestinian boys I knew in Israel—did not seem to be my people. With an adolescent's laser focus on hypocrisy, I would see the veneration of Jews all around me who lacked sensitivity, intelligence, depth or moral righteousness. No matter how loudly I raised my voice in protest against what I saw, no one seemed to care. I was dismissed with that ultimate wave of the hand: an angry teenager.

One rainy afternoon in Jerusalem, I ducked into my favorite English bookstore in an alley off of Ben Yehuda. Browsing the book section, I came across a copy of a book called *The Little Disturbances of Man* by Grace Paley. Since I was feeling quite disturbed myself, the title was immediately appealing. I found a table in their small adjoining café, lit up a cigarette (remember, I was perfecting my alienated teenager routine) and began to read.

Paley's words struck me like a shofar blast. Her writing leaped off the page, grabbed me by my heart and didn't let go. There was her voice: powerful and singular, funny, honest, compassionate and above all things, deeply, profoundly Jewish. My new rush of love was cemented when I came across the story "The Loudest Voice," the tale of a Jewish girl in a public school who is asked to narrate the Christmas pageant over all of her gentile friends because she has, without dispute, the loudest voice—and that loud voice was her great gift.

These were not stories of nice Jewish girls who married their camp boyfriends. Here was a Jewish woman who celebrated her ambivalence, her loudness, and a Judaism that was steeped both with being an outsider and a commitment to social justice. Reading her words, for the first time, I thought that maybe there was room for a Jew like me—someone who identified most with the otherness of being Jewish, of not fitting into the mold. Paley's loud, unapologetic, empathetic voice helped me find my own. And, for the first time in that long, lonely year, I felt hope for the Jewish woman I could become.

Ruth Andrew Ellenson is the editor of *The Modern Jewish Girl's Guide to Guilt* (Dutton, 2005).

Room in the Heart

within

I was eight years old, surrounded by friends on the dusty playground in what I now know was a lower-class neighborhood of Los Angeles. My friends—one Japanese, another Negro, one a proud Comanche and a couple of blond, perky Protestants—gazed at me in astonishment that could, any moment, develop into hostility. "You mean, you don't believe in Jesus? You don't have Christmas?"

I knew about hostility, having escaped from Nazi Germany several years earlier. Mama had brought us three girls safely to America saving our lives and launching us into a new world of opportunity and struggle. It was obvious that we were different, not only poor but "strange."

I might, in that moment of veiled confrontation, have laughed, disavowed my denial of Christmas and all that it implied, and blended in. My friends might then have invited me to come over and help trim the tree, sing songs and share all the delights of their favorite day of the year. But I took a deep breath and I told them the truth: "I am Jewish. We do not

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pray to Jesus. And while you are having Christmas, we celebrate Hanukkah."

In truth, Hanukkah didn't mean much at our house. We lit some candles, and Mama tried to create a festive mood by giving each of us a plate of prettily arranged nuts and sweets. But something told me that this was not about holidays. It was a moment of choice. I could choose to be a Jew not only at home, but here in the school yard also.

The girls stared openly. They asked a few questions, the kind that still plague theologians and philosophers, and which I, in my quaint naïvete, answered as well as I could. Then Rosanne the Comanche proposed, "Let's go play tether ball," and we all ran to be first, knowing Rosanne could beat us all but still willing to play together.

Looking back, that small incident in my childhood stands out as a symbol for the rest of my life. In high school I was picked to join a club for Jewish girls only, and I immediately attempted to integrate it. My friends were aghast; they simply weren't ready or willing to mingle with girls of other religions and races. I quit the club after a while, and in my senior year went to a camp called Anytown USA, where students of all races and background were gathered as an experiment in tolerance. I felt that I was born for this, to mingle, to understand, to learn about these others, and never to forget that I was once a stranger.

We become grown-up Jewish women by first being Jewish children, secure in our traditions, ready to meet the larger world with integrity and understanding.

Sonia Levitin is the author of 40 books for adults and children, most recently *Room in the Heart*, and a science fiction thriller, *The Goodness Gene* (Dutton, 2005).

I was born in 1946, in Amsterdam, and moved to the United States before I was a year old. In the next two years, I moved to Israel, and then back to the United States. I remember none of this.

But in 1958, when I was 12, I visited Israel again for an entire summer and fell in love with everything—the smells of the farms within the moshav, the heat, the adventures, and a handsome boy who actually told me he loved me in Hebrew! I spoke Hebrew poorly but enthusiastically.

I came back to New Jersey where I was growing up, now with a ever prouder Jewish identity because of my connection to an exotic, erotic other place—Israel. In the ensuing two years, while I was wending my way through junior high, Otto Preminger was on the West Coast creating the movie *Exodus*. When it was released, my mother, a woman who rarely went to the movies, took me into The City (i.e. New York), to see it. As the schmaltzy music soared and the gorgeous Paul Newman played his part beneath the blue skies, I began to sob uncontrollably. I sobbed so much that I put my head down on my mother's lap and saw very little of the actual movie. (Only 40 years later, when I got the video version, did I sit through an entire showing and realize that the film is very problematic—but that's another story.)

I can't fully explain why I cried so hard. Was it for something I had *lost* when I left Israel after that magical summer? Perhaps. What I think those tears more accurately represented was a sense of being *found*. Here I was, a young Jewish girl who never saw herself reflected in popular culture, watching a movie that expressed how I felt. Someone understood who I was, what I loved. My romantic image of Israel was shared by someone I didn't even know. At that moment, in the dark movie theater, I felt that my being was made clear. I was a Jewish Zionist female, and I would try to find other people who understood and appreciated what that meant.

A few months later, a young Israeli boy—the first one I had ever met in the U.S.—moved to my town and came to the high school in which I had just started 10th grade. On his very first day at my school, I walked up to him and said hello, in still broken Hebrew. He became my boyfriend immediately. A few years later we married. My Zionist and female identities have shaped my life continuously. Although as an academic, my attitude toward Israel is more nuanced than emotional, my recent book [with Mark Raider], *American Jewish Women and the Zionist Enterprise*, can be read on one level as a continuation of the early stories of my life. But perhaps even more significant, my latest book (with Penina Adelman and Ali Feldman), *The JGirl's Guide*, is the book I wish I could have read when I was a young girl. Although seeing *Exodus* was an overwhelming experience, its significance stemmed, in part, from the fact that there was nothing else out there. I wonder what films are shaping Jewish grils; identities today.

Otto, wherever you are, you should know what a great service you provided!

Shulamit Reinharz is a professor of sociology at Brandeis. She led its Women's Studies Program, created the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute and founded Brandeis's Women's Studies Research Center.

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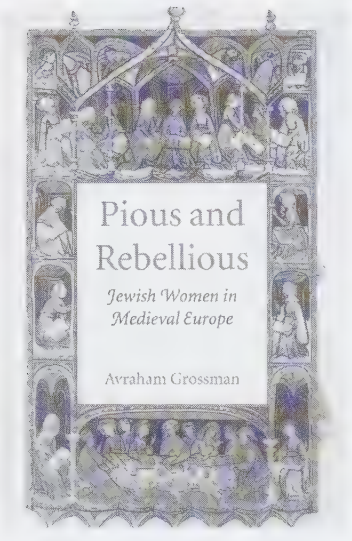

These powerful women, 1000 years ago, **supported themselves, ran financial empires, and could unilaterally dissolve a marriage.**

Medieval Jewish Women Make Great Role Models

It is hard to imagine a book about medieval Jewish women being a bestseller, but in Israel this book was. In *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe* by **Avraham Grossman** (Brandeis University Press, $29.95), there is no retelling of potboiling stories, or unearthing of scandal. Grossman is a cautious historian, refusing to make grand statements about his sources, or to speculate about events he cannot know. So what makes this book so compelling? Why did I find this dry history so difficult to put down? The answer, I think, is this: Grossman loves these ancient Jewish women, and indeed, there is much to love.

Often married off in infancy, and certainly between the ages of 12 and 16, the girls/women Grossman describes were frequently left by their husbands for years at a time while the men engaged in international trade. As a result, the women supported their households and raised their children alone, and in this they excelled. **The primary activity of Jews in Europe was money lending, and the women, too, ran loan portfolios**, sometimes with their husbands and families, sometimes on their own. Many amassed considerable personal wealth, and prestige as well, because women's businesses created opportunities for alliances with the gentile ruling classes.

Economics, says Grossman, is the key to understanding the status of Jewish women in the years 1000-1300. The significant advances made by women in this period can be linked to their financial power, as well as the status of women in gentile Europe. The changes in family law during this era were most far-reaching. Beginning in the seventh century, Jewish women were able to obtain a divorce against their husbands' will and take their own money as well as their marriage contract settlement with them when they divorced. This rule lasted 500 years, during which period the breakup of marriages became so rampant that rabbis began issuing a series of increasingly draconian monetary penalties on women when they exercised the power to force divorce on their husbands. Despite these financial discouragements, women's apparent desire to be separated from their husbands continued unabated. This is remarkable both because it showed women were confident in their ability to support themselves, and because **it was in such contrast to the situation in the Christian world, where divorce was nonexistent**.

The Jewish ban against polygyny was enacted in Western Europe in this era, perhaps in response to married men traveling to other lands for business, and taking second wives while away. The first wives were often abandoned, and the rabbis abhorred such behavior. A twin ruling forbade a man to divorce a wife against her will. The net result was that **for a couple of centuries, a woman could divorce her husband against the man's will, but not vice versa!**

Also at this time, the penalties against men for abusing their wives greatly increased, and included imposing corporal punishment, "cutting off his hand," and excommunicating the abusive husband.

In the spiritual realm, Western European women battled for, and won, the right to say blessings over rituals which they were permitted, but not obligated, to perform—for example, the blessing over *lulav* and *etrog* on Sukkot. In Germany, woman acted as *sandakiot* —holding their sons or grandsons during the circumcision. Rabbinic leaders fought to end this practice, as an immodest intrusion of a woman into the synagogue. But for a long time, the women prevailed, perhaps because the infants' fathers were so often away.

On the negative side, rules regarding modesty and restricting the activities of the menstruant were strengthened in this era. Partly due to the influence of the Jewish mystics and pietists, the rulings may also have been related to the atmosphere disdaining sexuality amongst the Christians. Whatever its causes, the new rules limited women's ability to participate in Jewish ritual life, but not in business, so it is not surprising that it was in the latter area that they concentrated their energies.

Grossman has a particular soft spot for one woman, Dulca, murdered by Christian rioters, and elegized by her husband in a moving poem. She "was among those who assisted in providing supplies for the synagogue, and…visited [there] frequently, taking care to arrive early for prayer and to leave the synagogue late, so as not to make her prayer

appear as if it were a burden…[she took] care to pray daily, morning and evening. She taught other women how to pray and embellish the prayer with music." Women like Dulca played critical roles in the persecution of the Jews in the medieval era, becoming martyr figures, encouraging their husbands and children not to give in to the rioters' demands to convert. This also increased their prestige in the eyes of their husbands and leaders.

There is not a single work written by women from this era which Grossman has uncovered, not in law, mysticism, or kabala. He is shocked by this, particularly since creative writing by both Christian and Muslim women has survived. He theorizes that women's work was centered around the home, and that, in a hostile Diaspora, bearing children and keeping them alive to adulthood was immensely difficult, and had recognized spiritual value. There were no equivalents to nunneries where Jewish women could immerse themselves in learning and creating. They were involved in household and business management immediately upon leaving childhood.

I disagree with Grossman that nothing in writing survives from our female Jewish medieval ancestors. What of those money lending ledgers? Why are they not evidence of the creativity of women, of their drive to survive, and succeed? Why are they not as impressive as works of philosophy and mysticism?

Ashkenazi Jews exist today because of the resourcefulness of the women Grossman describes, their financial genius, their flexibility in the face of constantly changing circumstances, their refusal to submit to their Christian oppressors. The voices of medieval Jewish women sing to us today in our blood—in our very existence.

—C. Devora Hammer

Judith Plaskow's Radical Realities

In the introduction to her new book, feminist theologian and activist **Judith Plaskow** writes that "Jewish feminism gave me an appreciation of communities of identity, not as completely safe spaces or as resting places but as laboratories in which to create models of feminist practice that can be applied in a variety of spheres." The collection of Plaskow's essays, *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-2003* (Beacon Press, $19), presents the experiments and results of more than three decades in the lab.

From her role as a founder of the feminist spirituality group B'not Esh (Daughters of Fire), to the publication in 1990 of her germinal work of Jewish feminist theology, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*, to her current work on sexual ethics, Plaskow has been among the most prominent of Jewish feminist leaders and teachers. Reading her early essays alongside more recent pieces is a reminder of the great success of Jewish feminism as well as of the work that remains to be done.

When Plaskow began writing, there were no women rabbis, little interest was paid to women's religious experiences, and no one had ever composed a feminist midrash. Now, in pieces written over the past few years, Plaskow calls our attention to the treatment of gay and lesbian Jews and the continuing need to question claims made in the name of tradition. These essays are as important now as her earlier work was in 1970's, as gay marriage and gay rights continue to be at the forefront of debate in Jewish (and non-Jewish) circles. Her thoughtful introduction provides an overview of how her thinking developed in connection with events and experiences in her own life and explains how she came to move from one area to the next.

With training as a theologian and the experience of feminist consciousness-raising as her guides, she has focused not on Jewish law or Talmud but instead on questions of how we understand and speak about God, Israel and Torah. Her 1982 essay "The Right Question is Theological" remains a strong defense of this choice. In more recent writings, she offers nuanced views that often challenge the conventional wisdom among Jewish activists. For example, she criticizes congregations that eliminate the reading of *Leviticus 18* (the chapter from the Torah in which homosexuality is strongly condemned as sinful) from the traditional Yom Kippur liturgy without careful discussion of what contemporary Jewish values regarding relationships and sexuality should be. One particularly strong argument appears in an essay for an anthology in which feminists from many religions wrote on the topic of "good" sex. "Authority, Resistance and Transformation: Jewish Feminist Reflections on Good Sex" argues that "it can be strategically useful to point to the contradictions or moments of self-criticism within normative texts, showing how opposing positions can be justified on the basis of the same sources. Yet it is not useful to argue

She has been running a **laboratory for feminist religious practice.** Here are her lab notes.

about which position is finally more authentic. From the perspective of the texts, the question of authenticity has no meaning; **the texts encompass genuine disagreements. The argument over texts is in reality an argument over competing social visions."** As this statement shows, Plaskow's work consistently cuts to the heart of the matter. Her work is a provocative reminder that we should never cede authority over our own religious lives.

—Claire Sufrin

Food, and Family Bonds

Who knew that family meals could **prevent obesity, anorexia and drug use?**

When I was growing up in Denver in the 1950s and '60s, my parents insisted our family eat dinner together nearly every night. The food was homemade, and your excuse for not being there, especially for Friday night Shabbat dinner, had better be *really* good. With my parents, four kids and at least one or two dogs squished into our small kitchen, those dinners were often noisy and full of rivalries and arguments. But there we were, together. I don't know if I actually turned out any better than those friends or other kids in the neighborhood whose families rarely ate together or who ate in front of the television, but now here's a book telling me that, without a doubt, my parents were right.

In *The Surprising Power of Family Meals: How Eating Together Makes Us Smarter, Stronger, Healthier, and Happier* (Steerforth Press $22.95), **Miriam Weinstein** argues convincingly and with great optimism that eating together nourishes more than just our bodies...although bodies do get a boost as well because of better nutrition at these daily gatherings. What I as a child often thought of as a somewhat arbitrary family rule turns out to be Weinstein's "magic bullet"—a vital ritual full of all kinds of benefits and rewards, from higher self-esteem and academic achievement to stronger spirituality, coping skills and social relationships, especially within our own families. Apparently, table time together can help fight obesity, eating disorders, anxiety, substance abuse and asthma among other ills personal and societal.

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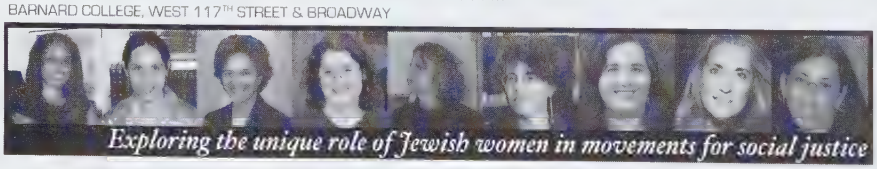
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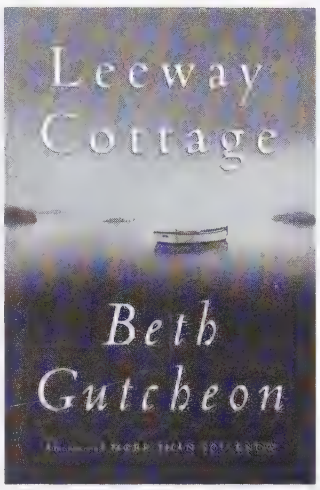
It almost sounds too good to be true. Weinstein acknowledges there are confusing statistics on who is or isn't sharing ordinary family suppers, but she backs up her argument in favor with impressive research from such institutions as the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, the Emory (University) Center for Myth and Ritual in American Life and the Eating Disorders Institute of Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park, Minnesota. Her conversational style makes the book easy to digest and if you need further convincing, there are also Jewish connections such as the value of Shabbat, with all of its family food traditions, as an anchor in many Jewish homes and lives. **Kashrut and the abundant blessings and prayers related to food emphasize the importance of eating with awareness and appreciation—"mindfully."** Some of the Jewish blessings are included in a special section, along with suggested discussion topics for table talk.

If family meals can do so much good, why don't more of us partake? Because, Weinstein contends, it's like eating all our veggies: knowing what's good for us and doing it are two different things. So she offers some advice for those who feel too challenged to undertake family meals. At this point, the book gets a bit repetitive and much of the "how to" seems simplistic, but who can argue with her advice to slow down, connect and find pleasure around ordinary, everyday family meals? It turns out that, in the end, *what* we eat and *how* we get it on the table don't even matter as much as just sitting down *together* over food.

—*Susan Barocas*

A Different Holocaust Heroism



The story of how ordinary citizens managed to save 7,000 Danish Jews from falling into Nazi hands is one that has been recounted before, but not, perhaps, with the richness and vigor found in the epic new novel by **Beth Gutcheon**, *Leeway Cottage* (William Morrow, 2005, 24.95).

Spanning several decades, its focus stays on Laurus Moss, a Jewish musician from

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Our Reviewers

Susan Barocas teaches cooking in addition to writing and producing film and video. Based in Washington, DC, she is at work on a cookbook about family food.

Evelyn Torton Beck is professor emerita of English at the University of Maryland and the author of *Nice Jewish Girls, A Lesbian Anthology*.

Arielle Gomberg is a student at Douglass College, Rutgers University.

C. Devora Hammer has written for The Washingtonian, The Forward, Los Angeles Jewish Journal, and, of course, LILITH.

Claire Sufrin is a doctoral candidate in Modern Jewish Thought in the department of Religious Studies at Stanford University.

Yona Zeldis McDonough is Lilith's fiction editor. Her new novel, *In Dahlia's Wake*, was published by Doubleday.

Denmark, and Sydney Brant, the American woman with whom he falls in love. This portrait of a marriage is broad, sprawling and filled with a pantheon of supporting actors; Gutcheon has a graceful, sure-handed way of limning fully breathing, palpable individuals, often with only a few strokes.

One of the most memorable is Laurus's younger sister, Nina, "a luscious girl, the darling of her family" with a "laugh that starts in her chest and bubbles up as if her throat were a glass overflowing. " Her fury against the German invaders soon translates into action; small acts of resistance and sabotage lead to smuggling entire families out of the country. She is caught by the Nazis, sent to a concentration camp, and we pick up the thread of her story after she is liberated, a survivor story with a happy ending. Or is it?

No longer the laughing, lovely girl of her brother's memory, Nina has become a pinched spinster who wears her sorrow like "a poisoned cloak." Her nieces and nephews think she is strange; her sister-in-law finds her "a pain in the ass." Now we catch only glimpses of Nina's life, and her eventual death as old woman. It's then that the author catapults us back in time, to the months of her imprisonment. In a chapter as harrowing as it is brave, we learn the day-to-day degradations Nina is forced to endure: the physician's internal exam, after which she feels "she will never again be completely human," the smell of shit and lime from the outdoor pits that pass for toilets, the sight of corpses that bear marks of the prisoners who have tried to eat them. The worst is still to come: Nina is given the job of quieting the children who are about to be gassed, and carrying their bodies to the crematoria. It is only after coming to the end of this extraordinary piece of writing—writing that reads like testimony as much as it does fiction—that we fully understand why, despite her "rescue," the rest of Nina's life unfolded as it did. She deserves to become one of the great literary heroines of Holocaust literature; although Nina Moss did not exist in any literal sense, her story, as we now know, is all too real. Read it and weep.

—Yona Zeldis McDonough

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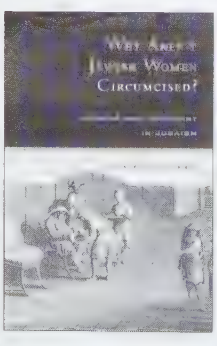

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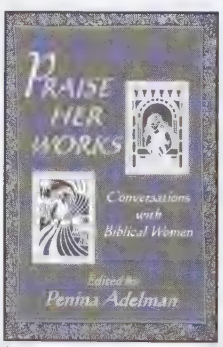

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Motherhood Galore! 7 New Books Stake Out the Scene

1. *Overcoming Infertility: A Guide for Jewish Couples* by **Richard V. Grazi** (Toby Press, $29.95) looks at advances in both medical techniques and Jewish law. It's a reference book aiming to provide hope and guidance to observant Jewish couples in need of medical intervention to become parents.

2. *The Middle of Everything: Memoirs of Motherhood,* by **Michelle Herman** (University of Nebraska Press, $25), interweaves growing up in Brooklyn in the cloud of her own mother's depression with Herman's struggle to break her mother's mold and become the "perfect" mother herself.

3. *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother?* by **Miriam Peskowitz** (Seal Press, $15.95) will be familiar to Lilith readers who had a preview in an article called "Playground Revolution" [Summer 2004]. Peskowitz examines the collision between work and mothering, and reveals that there may not really be a war at all, but rather structural issues in sociaty that need redress.

4. *For Generations: Jewish Motherhood,* edited by **Mandy Ross** and **Ronne Randall** (www.FiveLeaves.co.uk), is a collection of poems, quotes and stories, religious and secular, from the Diaspora to Israel.

5. *The Dream of the Perfect Child,* by **Joan Rothschild** (Indiana University Press, $24.95) shows how the drive for human perfection masks a darker motivation to eliminate everything that doesn't meet our heightened standards. Rothschild critiques genetic and prenatal testing, and quotes from feminist and medical ethics, as well as from pregnant women and people with disabilities.

6. *How She Really Does It: the Secrets of Success From Stay-at-Work Moms* (Da Capo Press, $19.95). **Wendy Sachs** interviews a diverse batch of mothers working, as the saying goes, outside the home to figure out how and why they manage to remain sane and happy. The book is billed as "a modern working woman's handbook."

7. *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety,* by **Judith Warner** (Riverhead Books, $23.95), explores why many mothers still spend so much time suppressing feelings of guilt, anxiety and regret. Warner analyzes magazines and

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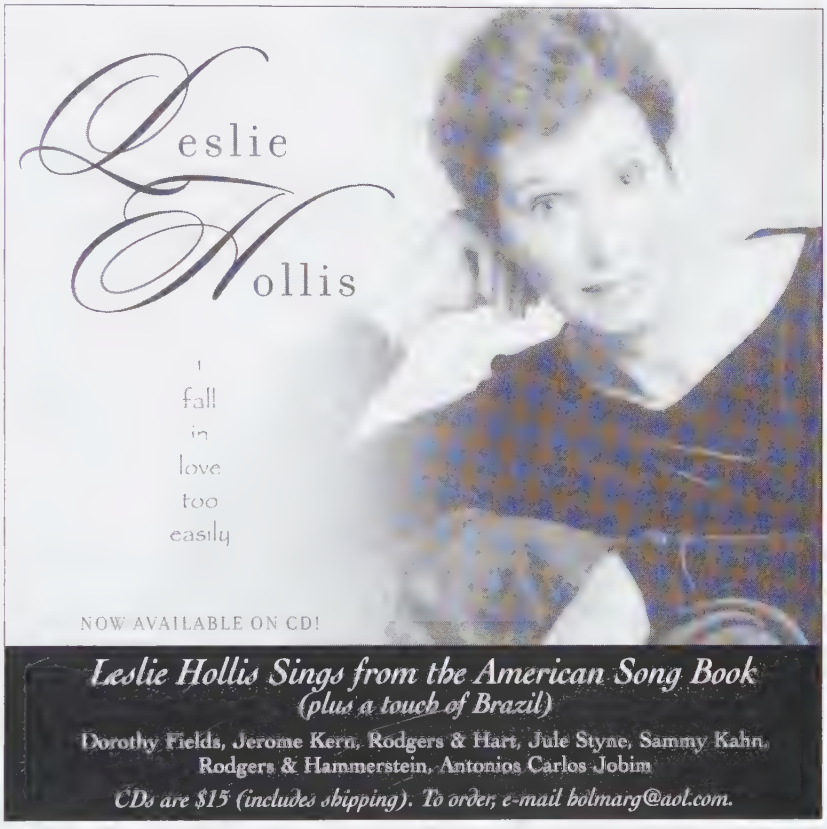
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television shows to demonstrate our "me-first" cultural assumptions and the forces that have shaped them

—complied by Lauren Kranson

Sacred and Profane

Song of Hannah by **Eva Etzioni-Ha-Levy** (Plume, $14) is a Biblical love triangle, as told by the two wives of Elkanah. Etzioni-Halevy portrays Elkanah as a womanizer, as she does the prophet Samuel, Hannah's son. Although the biblical account of Samuel's conception emphasizes the infertile Hannah's desperation, and her piety, Etzioni-Halevy makes her prudish and self-righteous, while Elkanah's first wife, Pninah, uses her husband's emotional and physical infidelities as justification for her own extra-marital affairs. Though few women in biblical times were literate, Hannah and Penina are both scribes in the novel, allowing them to comment on developing Jewish law. Thus this generic romance novel touches on the beginning of the cycle that characterizes the biblical books of the Prophets: Samuel entreats the people to return to Torah law, the people do not listen, God sends the Philistines into war against them as punishment, the Israelites return to God and prevail.

—Arielle Gomberg

Ortho-dykes in Israel

The powerful film "Keep Not Silent," by **Ilil Alexander** (Women Make Movies) allows us to see inside the world of self-styled "Ortho-dykes" and what it feels like to be a lesbian within Israel's Orthodox Jewish community, which reviles same-sex relationships. Although most of these lesbians have chosen to marry men and become mothers, they refuse (or are unable) to completely silence the deepest, truest part of themselves, which is sexually and emotionally drawn to women. The film focuses on the lives of three lesbians, two of whom must conceal their identities behind a screen in this film, lest they be recognized and ostracized from their communities. Their need to hide is made concrete, creating a visual tension that also gives the film an eerie quality of mystery.

All three women have made difficult and brave decisions. One chooses complete abstinence from sex with women, a pledge which, even after 20 years, she is hard-pressed to keep. A second divides her loyalties—she remains married to her husband but (with his knowledge and support) has a woman lover to whom she is committed. The third speaks as herself, but recognizes that she will pay a heavy price for becoming visible as a lesbian. Yet in spite of what she knows is a risk, she and her partner create a moving wedding ceremony which her parents (but, fortunately, not her brother and sister) adamantly refuse to attend. "Keep Not Silent" is a brave, groundbreaking, must-see film, compelling and poignant.

—Evelyn Torton Beck

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Exit the Hollow Moon

by
Brana Day

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(continued from page 48)

adolescent and he is going through many changes: school, neighborhood, friends...Just like me, but I always think of him as my little brother.

Papá is living with a woman he probably began dating when he was still married to Mamá. Once I found some make-up in our car when I was 11 or 12. It did not look like Mamá's. They are living together in the suburbs of Buenos Aires, but we don't have his address. I just know that it is about two hours from home. I saw her a couple of times. I don't like her. Perhaps because she took Mamá's place. She looks skinny and nervous like Mamá, but much less educated.

My parents never stop studying. In our family you have to keep studying until the last day of your life. I seem to be following in their footsteps. Nearly every day after school I have my private language lessons. The few times I saw Papá's girlfriend I felt like speaking French.

Even though my father and his girlfriend live far from us, my father set her up in her own business, a grocery store, a few blocks from our apartment. I do not understand. Of all the neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, why did they have to choose ours? I only hope Mamá doesn't come across her.

"Ring, please ring!" I shout to the intercom. Amazingly it rings. My father is waiting downstairs.

"Don't forget the envelope," Mamá screams from her bedroom.

They don't give me a chance to forget... the dear envelope.

We wonder what restaurant is open at 3:42 pm in Buenos Aires. We decide to try our favorite restaurant on Montevideo Street. Montevideo Street is full of restaurants, close to the theaters and movie houses located along Corrientes Avenue, in the center of town.

We don't go to the theater with Papá, but we go to restaurants. It has become a ritual to choose the one that will hold our talking and breathing for the next two hours. We like nice restaurants, not too fancy, not too humble. We care—or Papá cares—about the service. The waiter has to be polite and has to know what to recommend. In Argentina in the 1980's *el mozo*, the waiter, is generally a man. He has to be able to do more than just enumerate the dishes of the day. He needs to know which cut of meat is the best one of the day.

It is true that Argentinians love meat. We know about every cut of the cow; we learn it in kindergarten. Meat means cows for us. Meat has to be red. Don't tell me chicken is meat. I will laugh!

In this particular restaurant on Montevideo Street we love the waiter. He is friendly and caring. I am sure he realizes that Papá is divorced because he treats us very warmly. It is still not so common to see divorced people in Buenos Aires, and we look like an outstanding example. This middle-aged man with two kids at lunch on a Saturday.

Imagine what is going to happen. Papa is going to open it and begin to shout.

Argentinian food is influenced by Italian, Spanish and French cuisine, among others. First we eat an appetizer. One of my favorites is *lengua a la vinagreta,* cow tongue cooked in vinegar with spices. Later on a main dish, like *lomo al champignon con papitas noisettes*—boneless fillet with mushrooms and little potato balls. Of course don't forget the dessert. What about a *charlotte?* Vanilla ice cream with hot chocolate on top. Delicious!

Usually after lunch we enjoy seeing art. We know every museum in town and every new exhibition. Art is our passion. The three of us gather around a picture, and for a moment we are reunited in a sort of familial peace that only we can understand. It is a kind of magical peace.

We love the Museum of Fine Arts, *Museo de Bellas Artes*, the main art museum in the city. It is located in the placid and aristocratic Recoleta neighborhood. During the weekends an artisan fair in the park gives the area a more casual and relaxed air. The artisans display crafts of unique beauty for the tourists and for us *porteños*. I enjoy going there and, even more, taking presents home.

During these hours I can forget about the envelope. I don't want to wake up from these rare moments of contentment. For a few hours we are happy and relaxed talking mostly about art and school. Geri and I know that the moment we change the subject the spell is gone. And we want to keep it alive as long as we can.

But every journey has an end. We are in the car nearing home. I begin to imagine what is going to happen when I give the envelope to Papá. He is going to open it, unfold the paper that Mamá wrote so carefully, and begin to shout about how much money she is asking for.

I don't want to know how much she wants. I don't want to know how much he is willing to give her. I don't want to negotiate. I need shoes, it is true, but I need my teenage years too.

Many times Geri and I have begged Mamá and Papá to make a different arrangement. Maybe to see each other once a month and work out their financial situation. Papá always says *no!* A flat and clear *no!* He apologizes, saying that every week money flows in a different way and he is not sure how much cash he can offer. Everything depends on how many patients he will see in his office. Still he always says *no* to our request.

The envelope is his power over us. It makes him feel powerful. Sometimes I wonder if he thinks we are eager to meet with him just to get the envelope. *El famoso sobre.*

I know he is not going to let it go. Probably we will have to suffer through the envelope ritual for many more years. Who knows what is inside others peoples' minds? Even when one of them is your father.

Graciela Berger Wegsman, a writer and translator, is a native of Argentina. She lives in New York City.

happening

Catch the landmark exhibition **Lilith Magazine: the Voice of Jewish Women**, spotlighting the dramatic changes in Jewish women's lives over the magazine's nearly 30-year span. Nov. 3-30 at the Hebrew Union College Museum, Cincinnati (*www.huc.edu/museums/cn*). January 8 to February 19 at the Adolph and Rose Levis Jewish Community Center, Boca Raton, FL (*www.levisjcc.org*). To find out about related special events in Ohio, Florida and elsewhere, visit the Lilith website, *www.Lilith.org.*

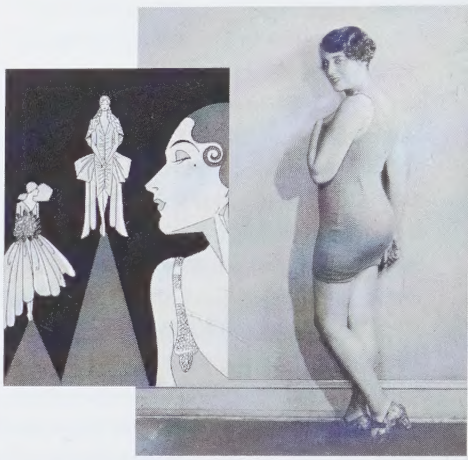
In Celebration of Jewish Women Writers, an all-day conference Sunday, Dec. 4, 2005, will feature Letty Cottin Pogrebin and Deborah Dash Moore. Panelists include Pearl Abraham, Anne Bernays, Jyl Felman, Carole L.Glickfeld, Blu Greenberg, Esther Hautzig, Dara Horn, Rona Jaffe, Francine Klagsbrun, Joan Leegant, Yonah Zeldis McDonough, Alicia Suskin Ostriker, Nessa Rapoport, Lynn Sharon Schwartz, Hilma Wolitzer and Meg Wolitzer. Under the auspices of the Eleanor Leff Jewish Women's Resource Center, National Council of Jewish Women NY Section, the conference will take place at Hebrew Union College in New York City. More details from *alandau@ncjwny.org.*

Good Business: Retaining and Advancing Women in Jewish Communal Service. A change-making manual recommends policies on work/life balance for women to ensure they're included and promoted. Published by the Jewish Communal Professionals of Chicago, it was created by professional women as part of project SULAM: A Career Ladder for Women in Jewish Communal Service, with funding from the Jewish Women's Foundation of Chicago. Download this manual at *www.jcsana.org* or at *www.ajcop.org.* For more information, email *jcpcsulam@sbcglobal.net.*

Are you at home with the kids? Jewish Communal Service Association Networking Parents is a group of Jewish communal professionals—educators, rabbis, social workers and others—currently at home with their children full or part time who want to stay connected to the Jewish work world. A listserv provides opportunities to share resources, offer feedback on flex time, telecommuting, volunteering and more. *www.jcsana.org*

3Gs, the third generation, grandchildren of Holocaust survivors in the New York area, have a website, live events, and online discussions. *www.3gnewyork.org*

The Joint Work features a collaborative piece that three women artists—Christian, Jewish and Muslim—created together. Over a year, a length of cloth made three trips around the world to the studios of Australian artist Irene Barberis, Iranian-born Parastou Forouhar, now living in exile in Germany, and American artist Jane Logemann. The result is the centerpiece of a new art exhibition which debuted in 2005 at the Jewish Museum of Australia. On view in its only U.S. venue from Oct. 20, 2005 to Feb. 26, 2006 at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco. *www.thecjm.org*



Hello Gorgeous! Fashion, Beauty, and the Jewish American Ideal decodes the cultural definition of beauty in America, exploring how Jews adapted, ignored, overcame, and reshaped these ideals. A collection of vintage clothing and accessories shows how Jewish identity was constructed through appearance and shows how Jews had an impact on American glamour through the garment industry. Sept. 18–April 16 at the Jewish Museum of Maryland. *www.jewishmuseummd.org*

Defining Family and those "ties that bind, bend, break and heal." For a summer /fall 2006 special issue on this theme, submit your original unpublished poetry, fiction or literary nonfiction in English, or unpublished translations in English, by Nov. 30, 2005 to *Crab Orchard Review.* *www.siu.edu/~crborchd/guid2.html*

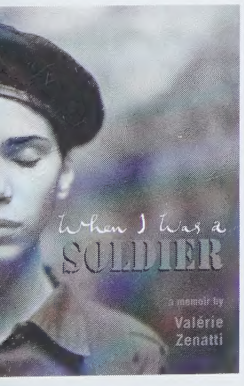
Jewish women in the economy. Women have always played central roles in the world of work and money. How has Jewish society, in different parts of the world, past as well as present, constructed

women's economic roles? To what extent have these roles enabled Jewish women to gain access to money and property, prestige and power? Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui is consulting editor for a spring 2007 issue of Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues. Send your proposal for an article by Feb. 1, 2006. *nashim@schechter.ac.il*

The Blue Card Fund makes financial grants to needy Holocaust survivors and, when necessary, to survivor's children with psychological needs. If you know of someone in need, or to make a contribution to the fund: *www.bluecardfund.org.*

Title IX's equal sports access for women is endangered. The U.S. Department of Education has issued a new "clarification" that lets schools forgo equal athletic opportunities if female students don't answer an email survey of their sports interest—a survey the schools have no obligation to send to male students. Learn more about this at *www.sporthealthresearch.org* and join an e-mail campaign sponsored by the advocacy group Dads and Daughters. *dads.e-actionmax.com/showalert.asp ?aaid=1429*

Sippurim, was founded by Susan Heitler, a Denver psychologist and grandmother, who, frustrated that most of the kids' books about Israel that she found focused on the Middle East conflict, sought a way to convey her love of Israel to her grandchildren via literature. Sippurim ("stories" in Hebrew) acts as a catalyst to develop books for young readers that detail daily life in Israel and to stimulate the writing and publication of picture books and novels set in Israel. They have also developed, in their Jewish Children's Book Project, a database that finds books for Jewish children by theme, holiday, age group, etc., and helps publishers of quality books for children on Jewish subjects find their audience. More information from director (and former LILITH intern) Natalie Blitt: *Natalie@sippurim.org; www.sippurim.org*



Men's Work and Worth. The latest in a series "Hearing Men's Voices," is geared to "involving Jewish men in Jewish life." This booklet from the Conservative/Marsorti movement's Federation of Jewish Mens Clubs asks: Are we what we do? Career and midlife changes are chronicled in personal essays by a doctor, a rabbi, a lawyer, a cabinetmaker and others. Earlier guides focus on how to welcome interfaith couples, and men's roles as fathers. ($14.95). *www.fjmc.org/StoreHMV.html*

"A Get Refuser. Yes, There is Such a Beast." Tamar Tzohar's winning poster in an Israeli competition sponsored by the International Coalition for Agunah Rights (ICAR), the Rackman Center and Emunah College.

Jewish Divorce Law: Protection or Life Sentence? asks Batya Levin, chair of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance Agunah Task force, in a special issue (summer 2005) of the JOFA Journal. Included are 24 pages of heartrending stories from the trenches, calls for reform by long time activists Rivka Haut and Susan Aranof and proposed solutions by Orthodox rabbis. A copy of the journal is free; (212)679-8500, *www.jofa.org.*

No Small Change, an intergenerational women's tzedekah collective, has created an imaginative and useful resource guide with Jewish sources on giving charity and questions to ask yourself, your parents, your sister collective members about your attitudes to money, giving, social change, gender and Judaism. The group began meeting about five years ago, encouraged by the doyenne of Jewish feminist philanthropy, Barbara Dobkin. Founders included former Lilith staffers and interns: Sarah Blustain, Rachel Dobkin and Susan Sapiro. Women in their 20s and 30s then invited Jewish teen girls to join them. *www.2164.net/PDF-newsletters/No SmallChange.pdf*

"Facing Breast Cancer as a Jewish Woman" addresses spirituality, Jewish holidays, being single, community support, marriage, mikvah, parenting through breast cancer, fertility and pregnancy and workplace worries. The latest publication from Sharsheret, the organization of young Jewish women with breast cancer. *www.sharsheret.org*

New Harvest: Jewish Writing in St. Louis, 1998-2005 features poetry, fiction, life stories and essays by current and former St. Louis residents, some well-known writers and others just emerging. This follows *First Harvest: Jewish Writing in St. Louis 1991-1997.* St. Louis may be the only community in the U.S. to publish this type of book. Included are Lilith authors Shelly R. Fredman, Julie Heifetz, Jane Ellen Ibur, and others. For a copy of the 500-page anthology send $20 plus $3 shipping to Brodsky Library. 12 Millstone Campus Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146. *www.brodskylibrary.org*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

The Envelope

Adolescence in Argentina

a memoir by
Graciela Berger Wegsman

As usual Papá is late. He promised us to come on time today but at 3 PM we still haven't had lunch.

"I am starving!" I tell my brother. The truth is that by this time I should know better and eat first. I get angry with myself for believing it might be different this time.

We are sitting in the living room watching TV. I go into the kitchen. I never saw another kitchen like Mamá's. The orange tiles are so shiny that they always look new.

There is such harmony in this cleanliness that I feel uneasy disrupting it. The envelope is sitting on the table.

"Let's have a sandwich, Geri. I can hear your stomach growling, too."

Geri is my brother. He is 12 and I am 15. My parents divorced two years ago and from that time we were thrown into this Saturday ritual. My father comes once a week on Saturdays to pick us up for lunch. By now, we know plenty of restaurants in *mi Buenos Aires querido* and we are very proud of that. It is really important for a teenager to grow up distinguishing different qualities of service.

Papá loves to make us wait. I know it has something to do with the envelope, but he is not aware of that. If you ask him why he arrives so late each time, he will tell you he just ran late. Papá is the head of the gynecology department in a big public hospital and also has his own practice. He works in the morning in the hospital, then he goes home to change clothes and later on he comes to visit us. Like the doctor that he is. A doctor's visit.

We don't know where he lives. We don't have a telephone number to call him; all we have is a pager number. During working hours we can call him at his medical practice.

"Gra, let's bet a pizza. Is he going to come at 3:30 or 3:45?"

Geri looks upset. He misses Papá. We only see him once a week and I don't think it is enough for the boy. He is an

(continued on page 45)

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